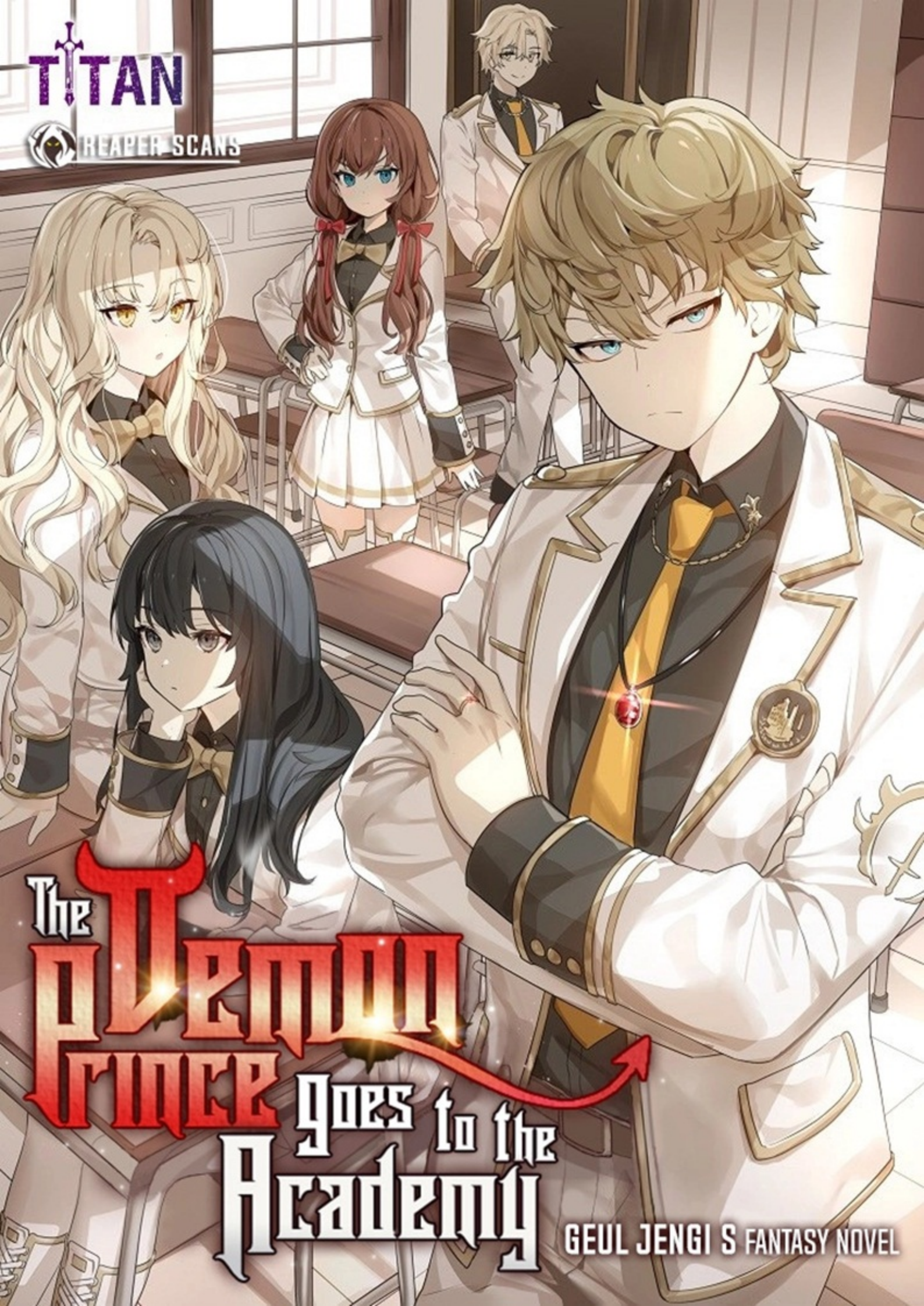
TITAN
REAPER SCANS
The Demon Prince goes to the Academy
GEUL JENGI S FANTASY NOVEL

THE DEMON PRINCE GOES TO THE ACADEMY

–마왕은 학원에 간다 –

- VOLUME 4 -

-AUTHOR-

Geul Jengi S

-ILLUSTRATOR-

RONOPU

[REAPER SCANS]

CHAPTER 151

After neutralizing the bastard next to me, I grabbed Austin, who was sitting on the other side of me, and threw him out of the carriage before I stepped out as well.

The carriage was just too narrow to fight properly.

Ellen smashed her sword into another man and then got out of the carriage herself.

It completely stopped in its tracks.

The coachman was on their side.

“What quick-witted kids.”

The three adventurers that were still unscathed climbed out of the carriage; their expressions showed that they were greatly alarmed.

Two of them had been beaten in an instant before they could even attack us.

“How did you know?” one of the men asked.

-Shiing

He drew his sword. Ellen drew her sword as well, standing before the guy.

“I heard that most adventurers aren’t any different from thieves.”

Adventurers…

They lived in places where the law couldn’t reach.

Ellen seemed to have heard about the real nature of adventurers from Artorius.

There were no robbers among adventurers.

…But all of them had the potential to resort to robbery if there was an opportunity.

“There are a lot of adventurers who, rather than taking actual risks, target novice adventurers armed with expensive gear.”

Ellen and I were decked out with rather expensive gear, and we were novices on top of that. We were also really young.

Those guys might not have been robbers.

However, as soon as they saw us, they felt like they had no other choice but to resort to robbery.

Ellen seemed to have known that it would turn out like that. The Darklands weren’t some fairytale-like lands full of romance, adventure, and mystery.

…They were the lands of robbers infested by adventurers who sought money, not an adventure.

Adventurers risked their lives to earn money.

If they had the opportunity to earn some money without much risk, then there was no reason for them not to take it.

They knew that stripping Ellen of her equipment and selling it would get them a lot more than them taking risks by hunting demons and getting paid for exploring unknown terrain.

He kept looking at Ellen and me as if we were just holding a normal conversation.

They must have robbed others more than just once.

“N-no way… H-how could you do that…”

Austin staggered to his feet while also drawing his sword. I didn’t know if he would be of much help. He seemed to be on our side, making it a three-on-three situation.

“…Okay.”

The man who seemed to be the group’s leader nodded.

“Don’t regret it, brats!”

They started running towards us.

They approached Ellen, Austin, and me, respectively.

In an unexpected twist, I actually had to face humans in real battle, not demons. I had been nervous and tense before, but I didn't even feel the smallest bit of nervousness at that moment.

The guy before me swung his sword down on me.

I was a little confused, seeing him slashing down from top to bottom like that.

How could he come at me like that?

It was my first time in a real sword fight, but I had seen that attack over a hundred times already.

…And I had countered that attack over a hundred times as well.

There was just one big difference—

It was much too slow.

I grabbed the handle of my sword with my right hand and the blade with my left hand.

It was the half-swording technique Ellen had shown me.

I blocked the sword as it came down by holding my sword horizontally in front of it.

-Kang!

Then, by naturally turning the tip of my sword, I pushed my sword towards the man's neck.

Deflecting and stabbing at the same time: defense and offense were simultaneous.

His sword got pushed down to the right, and the tip of my sword was aimed at his neck.

If I pushed it further in, I could stab his cartoroid artery.

-Clink!

“S-spare me.”

In just a single hit, I managed to place my sword against the nape of his neck, and he immediately let go of his sword. He looked very pale.

-Bang!

“Kuork!”

Ellen didn’t even need to use her sword.

She incapacitated the man who was rushing towards her with a low kick. With only that single kick, the guy fell to his side, screaming.

…However, there was a really big difference in their body weight, and she just ignored all of that. How great was her leg strength?

“…”

-Clink!

And the guy who was about to fight Austin, after seeing the other two getting subdued so quickly, instantly let go of his sword.

"I-I surrender."

He wasn’t sure about Austin, but he quickly realized that he wasn’t a match for Ellen and me.

The fight ended as soon as it started.

A win was a win.

We managed to emerge victorious from a life-threatening situation.

“…What’s going on?”

However, it felt empty.

Why was it so easy? It started similar to my training sessions with Ellen, but the actual battle ended in just a single stroke.

Of course, it would be like that, huh.

“Anyway, you bastards. Let’s start with the center, shall we?”

It was time to rob the robbers.

* * *

There were five adventurers and one coachman.

After disarming all of them, I made them sit on their knees.

I squatted down in front of them and shook six money pouches in front of their eyes.

“What’s the point in hiding anything when you’re faced with death, huh? Give me everything while I’m still nice.”

“Thi-this is all we have…”

"I already said that we don’t have anything else…”

My threats seemed to have made them cry. Ellen just leaned her back against a tree, not caring about what I was doing, and Austin was staring blankly at me.

He seemed to find it unbelievable that I was in the process of reverse-robbing the robbers we had just overpowered.

"Looking at the party setup you have going, plus even employing a coachman, it’s more than clear that you’re habitual offenders. And yet, you have less than ten gold coins in total?”

"That’s! That’s… We used it all to buy equipment!”

“That’s right!”

“Is that so?”

I chuckled.

"Then we’ll just take that equipment."

Those guys were trying to steal Ellen’s and my equipment to begin with.

"Take it all off."

At my words, those bastards started taking their gear off. They might have been tempted to attack us using their bare hands, but Ellen and I were far beyond their skill level.

I sighed when I saw them completely undressed before me.

"Oh, yeah…”

The expression they displayed when I glanced at them was really a sight to behold. They probably never expected to be treated like that by someone so much younger than them.

“Didn’t I say you should take everything off? Do you think you have any human rights now?”

I rummaged through the clothes of those men that were naked except for their underwear and found five more gold coins.

* * *

Five adventurers and one coachman were sitting there in nothing but their underwear.

“What should we do? It’s difficult to take all of the equipment with us. It doesn’t look very useful either.”

We would get some money if we sold them, but their quality wasn’t anything to write home about. They had probably lied when they said that they spent all their money on buying equipment.

Maybe they just left it or hid it somewhere.

And we weren't really there to earn money…

Ellen shook her head at my words.

"Money isn't an issue. Let's decide what to do with these people first."

"Hmm…"

They didn't just suddenly turn into common robbers. I mean, they had even conspired with that coachman to rob us.

What happened to all the novice adventurers and weaklings they had robbed?

The fact that they hadn't been caught yet after doing those kinds of things with their faces exposed meant that not all the adventurers they got their hands on survived.

Ellen was asking a rather normal question, but it had a subtle meaning.

It was up to us to decide whether we should kill those vicious criminals or not. Regardless of whether we were able to do something like that or not…

If we had been defeated, they would have robbed and killed us.

Killing people…

I wondered if I was even capable of doing something like that.

I had blown up some knights while I was trying to escape from the Demon King's Castle, but I wasn't actually sure if they died or not.

However, I had seen people die right in front of me, and I had seen a vast sea of corpses.

Killing…

I didn't know if I could do something like that with my own hands. When I thought

about doing it using a sword… would I be able to handle that feeling?

I was familiar with violence, but I wasn't familiar with the concept of killing someone, and I didn't want to be, either; that should have been the same for Ellen.

But what was Ellen's opinion about it?

I mean, if I absolutely had to do it, I probably could do it, but I wouldn't be happy about it in the least.

"How about… We hand them over to the Exian Guards?"

Austin, who was listening to the conversation between Ellen and me, gave a careful suggestion. The six naked people before us sitting on their knees trembled terribly because our decision would decide whether they lived or died.

We didn't have to handle them. We could just leave them to the guards.

"…Anyone who looked at them would think that they were the ones robbed, not the ones who tried to rob us."

"…I suppose so."

I had no other choice but to agree with Ellen.

We didn't get hurt at all, and I had taken everything from the robbers except their underwear. If we took those guys to the guards and told them they were trying to rob us, we would actually be the ones ending up in jail.

"If these bastards told them we were actually the ones who robbed them, we'd get in trouble."

"N-no, no! We won't! If you let us live, we'll stay quiet! We'll just go to jail quietly!"

"That's right!"

"Please, have mercy on us just this once! We'll live a good life!"

Up until then, they had dismissed us as some brats, but it was quite funny seeing them being so polite to us when we had their lives in our hands.

“Would you fuckers believe me if I explained to you how I’d wake up tomorrow before I even went to sleep?“

Of course, I wouldn’t believe anything that came out of those guys’ mouths.

It might have been even more troublesome for us if we handed them over to the guards.

In most web novels I had written, one of the standard developments was that the main character cooly cut off the heads of mobs before moving on. Rather, if I didn't kill them off, I would get a lot of bad comments asking me why they hadn’t gotten killed.

Although I knew it was the right thing to do, I couldn’t make that decision so easily because of the situation I was in. Most people couldn’t even twist a chicken’s head with their own hands. However, if they suddenly got into a situation in which they had to kill a person, they would be rather disconcerted, right?

Of course, I wasn’t someone that never had to twist a chicken's neck before.

“I don’t really want to kill them, so should we just cut off their hands one after the other? Like that, they won’t be able to do something like this ever again. They might bleed out, so we have to burn the wounds to close them up.”

Austin and Ellen stared at me after I uttered these words.

Those gazes.

I knew what they meant.

“…Isn’t that even crueler?”

“…It’s so detailed. I’m scared.”

Ellen’s complexion was a bit pale. How rare.

“…”

Austin’s face turned kind of blue, and he couldn’t utter a single word.

Ah.

No, I didn't want to kill those guys, so I thought about a proper punishment to give them.

However, if we cut off their hands at their wrists, they might die from the bleeding, so wasn't it rather considerate of me to suggest closing it up with fire? Without that, they might die, you know? I was trying to be merciful there, you know?

…Is that a problem for people who are used to describing extreme violence in writing?

Come to think of it, didn't I come off as a total freak just then?

Let's pull out your eyes~ but if I do that, your face might collapse, so I'll put some pebbles that resemble them in your eye sockets. It's all because I care for you, see?

Did it sound something like that?

Austin seemed to be getting more and more afraid of me as time passed.

Of course, the robbers who heard about my plans were trembling like crazy, not taking into account their ghostly pale faces.

They seemed to regret having gotten on the bad side of a madman.

"I'll let you go."

It seemed that Ellen didn't want to have any blood on her hands after all.

"However…"

Ellen pointed to the leather armor they had taken off and the equipment and regular clothes.

The equipment was just too worn down, so it was unlikely that we would get anything for that stuff. And if we were actually trying to sell it, we might get suspected of having robbed some adventurers.

"Burn all of this."

For the crime of having tried to rob us, those guys were punished by having to return to the Exian Outpost in nothing but their underwear.

* * *

We burned up the robbers' equipment after saying we wouldn't sell it.

Things that couldn't be burned were destroyed by Ellen personally.

No matter if I was wearing shin guards or not, the scene of her breaking swords with her shin like they were wooden baseball bats made me shiver.

One usually couldn't break blades by kicking them, right?

That's what I thought, at least.

The robbers must have realized that they tried to lay hands on one absurd monster, as all of them looked rather drained.

Even though they just lost everything they had on them, they bowed their heads as we left, thanking us for letting them live.

Anyway, we managed to secure about eight gold coins and a carriage with three horses tied to it.

Austin, who had driven a carriage and went to St. Point before, was in charge of driving the carriage. Looking at how he was acting earlier, he was weak, so he didn't seem like the two-faced type.

Ellen and I sat on the remaining room on the box seat on either side of him, not inside the carriage.

"But aren't horses pretty expensive?"

Even if it was supposed to be a medieval Fantasy, this world had little to do with the actual Middle Ages.

But still, weren't horses incredibly expensive in the Middle Ages?

No, they were pretty expensive, even in modern times.

I felt like we earned a lot of money just by having stolen those robbers' horses.

I was just talking to myself, but Austin still answered.

"Ah… Well… That's true for horses a knight would use. Of course, these horses aren't cheap either, but…"

I nodded at Austin's explanation. The horses tied to the carriage looked bigger than ponies, but they probably couldn't be ridden well—they looked to be on the older side as well.

They definitely seemed to be of different breeds and weights from those I saw in Temple's horseback riding class. Austin was stuck between Ellen and me, so he was shivering terribly, probably feeling quite the pressure in having to drive the carriage properly.

"By… By the way, you guys are really strong."

"Yeah, I was also pretty surprised."

"Surprised?"

Yes.

I mean, I was really surprised that I managed to defeat them so easily.

"Even if they were specialized in robbery, I thought they were adventurers who had quite a bit of experience under their belt, so I didn't expect them to go down in a single strike."

Since they were vicious criminals, they should have had some experience in killing people and enough practical experience in fighting humans. However, the fight ended with just a counter of a simple downward slash.

If I hadn't stopped my sword there and had cut his carotid artery, I would have instantly sent that guy to hell.

"There aren't many people who have been professionally trained in the use of weapons."

Ellen answered me in a low voice.

Ellen crossed her arms as she watched the passing scenery.

“To be exact, most adventurers get by with those skills, but few have been actually trained in technique and the like.”

“I-is that so…”

Austin muttered in a daze as if he had been stabbed by Ellen’s words.

Being an adventurer was a job for idiots who liked to rush into battle without a thought; they did all sorts of other things as well. They carried weapons and wielded them, but most weren’t professionally trained fighters.

It was possible to become good with the sword while living as an adventurer. But what one learns is more akin to survival swordsmanship than the systematic swordsmanship we had learned.

—Swordsmanship meant for survival.

In other words, it was like a fight between a street fighter and an MMA fighter. Of course, one could push their opponent down just with the big weight difference, but techniques were great in controlling an opponent that didn’t know anything about them.

So that was probably why it felt so easy to subdue them.

“Most techniques are based on the assumption that the opponent is armed. It’s something one doesn’t need to know if one is only going to pursue a job as an adventurer… except in cases like we just witnessed.

Ellen’s words were really sensible.

Adventurers fought against demons and demonic beasts; they weren’t armed, for the most part. Of course, there were some among them that wielded weapons, but those were very special cases.

However, what Ellen and I had learned was how to subdue and kill an armed opponent.

In other words, they were techniques against armed humans.

Adventurers didn't need to know those kinds of things, so if one was only going to do the work assigned to adventurers, there was no reason for them to really learn proper swordsmanship.

Of course, it wouldn't hurt to know, but it wasn't necessary.

Anyway, Ellen and I had continued to hone our skills in subduing armed humans. So, no matter how much experience they had on us, they would never be an opponent for someone who had been trained systematically.

The swordsmanship they used on clumsy monsters and novices could be described as something that someone on the street might use at best.

Such a level of swordsmanship would never work against us.

I would never be able to surpass Ellen, and it was only a short time that I had been training, but regular people like them would never be able to defeat me, who had trained every day until I dropped.

After all, most adventurers' swordsmanship wasn't even beyond my pseudo-swordsmanship, which I had managed to level up not too long prior.

It was a new feeling.

"Did you two… learn professional swordsmanship?"

"…Well, if you ask like that, I'd say yeah."

I learned swordsmanship from lectures, but I learned the most from Ellen, so my swordsmanship teacher was actually Ellen.

"I envy you…"

The emotions carried by Austin's vague words didn't come to me so easily.

I thought I was quite weak compared to Ellen, and that still rang true.

I thought that I was quite average in battle strength for someone of the Royal Class.

However, Austin didn't even seem to have gotten the opportunity to learn swordsmanship. I didn't know if it was because of money, the lack thereof, or something else.

In Temple, they didn't just train the students in Royal Class how to use weapons. There were a lot of general students who chose combat majors.

Those guys would be treated like amazing talents in places like the Darklands.

After thinking about it, I understood what it meant to be a student of Royal Class, which could only be visited by a select few. I had even practiced daily and sparred with the strongest person in that place.

"…It would have been weird if it wasn't that easy."

It would have been rather strange if I hadn't overpowered them so easily back then.

Before I knew it, there was already a big gap in combat capability between me and the general public.

Even life-threatening fights felt pretty easy.

CHAPTER 152

The trip to St. Point was rather uneventful.

Austin had asked us how one could become stronger after he found out that we learned swordsmanship systematically. Perhaps he got curious after that.

"…All you need is a genius close to you."

"Her. It's her."

How to become stronger…

All one needed was to stick to some ridiculous genius and make them teach you every day. If one did that, no matter how ordinary one might be, one would get stronger, even if not to the level of that genius.

It could only be achieved if the genius was kind enough to give up their own progress to teach someone ordinary.

After thinking about it, Ellen was a real angel, wasn't she? No matter why she started teaching me, she still took good care of me. I thought about what I should do. There was nothing I could do to repay her, or was there?

Anyway, I pointed at Ellen, and Austin looked at her with a sickly expression on his face.

"A-are… Are you such a genius?"

"…I don't know."

Ellen didn't casually answer that she was.

A way to get stronger…

I was a little confident in my punches, but I didn't know if they would be effective in an actual battle. It wasn't to the point of calling them all-powerful, but they were still enough to easily suppress active criminals who didn't shy away from killing either.

"People like me are too old to enter something like a swordsmanship school. Fortunately, I heard there were some veteran mercenaries among the adventurers. I heard there were cases where they would teach some people certain things if they made you their disciple…"

I thought I had become stronger because I added some effort to my cheat-like abilities.

However, after listening to Austin's circumstances, it seemed to be slightly different.

I wondered if learning at Temple could be called a cheat in itself.

It seemed that one of the few ways Austin could actually get stronger was by becoming the disciple of a retired mercenary and learning their swordsmanship, which they may or may not share with him. He couldn't even become an esquire of an active knight.

Getting to train in Temple's environment could already be seen as a cheat to the general public. Not only did we have teachers with outstanding skills who were enthusiastic about their student's education, but there were also a lot of monsters among our peers.

Austin talked about learning from some retired mercenary as if it was a life-changing opportunity.

I got taught by teachers who far exceeded the skill level of regular knights, and I could practice as much as I wanted every day with the strongest prospects in the world.

Being able to make use of that environment truly was incomparable to the lousy cheats I had.

"What are you going to do when you become strong?" I asked Austin out of curiosity.

I was doing it for my own reasons, but for most people, it was supposed to be the start of a peaceful era. The Darklands had already been completely defeated.

What reasons did someone have to become strong in a world that didn't require one to be strong?

It seemed that most adventurers were gamblers and crooks with the goal of making a fortune quickly. Austin didn't seem to be that type of person.

"I want to be like Artorius."

At that, both Ellen and I fell silent.

Artorius was one of the most popular topics in the world, but it was a topic that was rarely brought up between Ellen and me.

Artorius had become a legend among adventurers.

For those adventurers who weren't greedy for money and still dreamed of romance and adventure, Artorius inevitably became their role model.

"Ahaha, I mean, of course, I'll never be like him… But it's something like a dream for me to be similar to him."

Austin laughed awkwardly, saying that he could dream at least.

"Then, do you even want to die like him?"

Ellen spoke quietly.

"…Huh?"

"Is it your dream to die like him as well?"

She spoke quietly, but her tone was as sharp as a knife. Austin's expression hardened slightly at her sudden words.

Do you want to be like Artorius to the point that you were willing to die while killing the Demon King?

The question was rather aggressive coming from Ellen.

“E-erm… W-well… If I could give my life for a great cause like Artorius… It would be an honor for someone like me. Of course, it’s much too presumptuous for me to put this in words!”

Austin apologized wildly, asking if he was too presumptuous, as that might be a bit unpleasant to hear for people who greatly admired Artorius.

People who respected Artorius were always very vocal about their feelings on the topic.

Ellen didn’t say anything for a while, but then she opened her mouth again as if to spit something out.

“Do you have a family?”

“Family? Ah… I have a sister and parents at home.”

Austin’s family composition was very similar to Ellen’s.

Ellen seemed to ponder for a long time. The guy was probably wondering why she was asking something like that.

“…”

One could tell that a multitude of words were running through her mind.

Austin was a novice adventurer. He wanted to be strong, but he wasn’t. If he hadn’t met Ellen and me that day, he would have already been a goner.

She probably wanted to tell him to just go home and stop dreaming about such useless things.

However, Ellen was indifferent to the lives of others, and she probably also thought about if she even deserved to say those words to him.

Telling him to go home just because he was weak would certainly hurt Austin.

That was why Ellen was thinking so deeply.

In the end, she said nothing.

* * *

The trip to St. Point took a total of four hours. We lost some time between using the Gate and getting here, so the sun had already set.

“But I’m glad we made it; otherwise, we would have to camp outside for the night.”

Austin smiled happily as we drove the carriage through St. Point’s entrance. This place really felt more like a base than a city.

If Exia was a big city, that felt more like a village. Those Points, which acted as supply bases for adventurers, were spread out along various parts of the Allied Forces' old route.

With such momentum, if their exploration progressed just a little more, a large urban area might be born with the Exian Outpost as its center.

It was night, but there were still quite a few buildings in St. Point that still had some lights turned on.

Even if it was not that big, it still felt like a place where people lived.

“But what do we do about this carriage?”

The carriage didn’t belong to us.

Because we had reached our destination, we had to do something about it.

“Take it.”

Ellen said such as if she didn’t really care, and I felt similarly, as I didn’t really want to have the carriage.

“I-is that really fine? With these three horses, one could earn more than a penny or

two…”

They were stolen goods, but the horses didn’t even have name tags on them.

"Whether you want to sell them or get rid of them, you can do whatever you want with them.”

“I-is that so…? Thank you, you two.”

“Just go back home with the money you get from selling… Well, never mind.”

Ellen was about to say something but stopped herself mid-sentence. Austin was an adventurer with an uncertain future. It seemed like she wanted to tell him to just go home with the money he would get from selling the three horses. However, she had no reason to meddle in other people’s affairs, so she stopped herself.

“My people are staying at the Lockhill Inn over there. If you want to find our party, just ask for a Mr. Hugson at the inn.”

We got down from the carriage, and Austin started to maneuver it towards the inn where his party was staying.

We somehow managed to get to St. Point.

“Let’s rest here for today; then, we’ll make our schedule and leave tomorrow.”

“Yes.”

It was time to look for Eleris.

* * *

The inn ‘House of Giants’.

Eleris was supposed to come across us there by chance and join our party. Since she was a wizard, she had plenty of arguments to persuade Ellen to let her join.

That was the plan, anyway.

-Noisy, noisy

However, as soon as I entered the House of Giants, I had to admit that I hadn't considered something very important.

-Hey Miss! Come with us!

-Hey, didn't I ask her first?

-If you come with us, I'll make it 50/50! The five of us would take 50, and you alone take the other 50. How about it?

-This bastard has no business ethics! How could you try to win her over with money!

-We'll give you three gold coins in advance on top of a 50/50 rate for all later proceeds! Even if we don't get much! See it as an opportunity to unconditionally earn three gold coins no matter what! We'll even pay you more! Okay?

The first floor tavern of the inn was in total chaos.

"Ah… Ahaha… Tha-that's… Well…"

There, amongst the countless recruitment calls of various people, there was a woman who was probably Eleris.

Her face shape was completely different from her original one, perhaps due to her disguise, but her facial features stayed the same. Her stature had gotten slightly shorter. Her changes were rather subtle, creating an effect of only seeming to resemble herself, but she was still really recognizable.

"…What's going on?"

"Yeah…"

But what the hell was going on?

Thousands of people around Eleris were begging her to come with them. There were some who said that they would give her money, and then there were some who said that she just had to take care of their performance as she would take everything they made.

They said that she could just go around with them while promising her the best treatment for some reason.

Why the hell?

I went to the innkeeper at the counter and slowly looked around.

“Do you have any vacancies?"

“Would a double room be enough?”

A double room.

“Do you want to have a private room?”

Ellen shook her head.

"I don’t know what’s going to happen. Let’s share one.”

She seemed to consider the possibility that something might happen to one of us and that the other wouldn’t notice at all because we were in single rooms.

We’d been almost robbed the first day we reached the Darklands, so one couldn’t be careful enough, I guess.

"Five silver coins."

I handed the innkeeper five silver coins and pointed at the bustling scene around Eleris.

“…By the way, what’s going on here?”

“Oh, that.”

The innkeeper sighed.

“There were rumors about a wizard being here, so even people from other inns came here to visit; that’s how this mess occurred. I’m not even going to sell alcohol in this atmosphere. If a fight broke out, that would be a big deal…”

Wizard.

"…What's the big deal about wizards anyway?"

At my words, the innkeeper furrowed his brow.

"…I mean, I thought as much, but you're a total greenhorn, aren't you?"

"You might find just a single wizard among 100 adventurers."

Ellen gave me an explanation.

It was only then that I understood what was going on. I thought wizards were rare, but I never imagined that they would be that rare.

* * *

Let us suppose there are 100 adventurers.

97 of them would be people with combat-related jobs.

Two of them would be priests.

And just one of them would be a wizard.

That was the terrible ratio the group called adventurers were made up of. They were idiots that jumped into the fray in hopes of making it big.

Among them were many robbers who didn't care about reputation or earning a big fortune, living off novice adventurers' equipment.

—Guys like the ones we had run into.

Most adventurers were simple idiots, nothing but thugs. Since anyone could become one, extremely few talented individuals were among them.

However, it was only obvious that the elite occupations, priest and wizard, were extremely rare, even among the very few talented people.

So, whenever a wizard appeared, a riot to recruit them would follow.

In MMORPGs, there was a great shortage of healers, as a lot of people thought they were no fun to play, but priests and wizards were treated as extremely valuable individuals due to their usefulness here.

It was a little funny, remembering the time when I was talking about the strengths of each magic major with Liana and the others.

Wizards that came to those kinds of places were usually battle wizards that majored in destruction ma; however, they were treated as unfavorable jobs in the wizarding world, so they weren't really popular.

However, in places like the Darklands battle wizards were a hot commodity.

Wizards were a well-recognized profession no matter where one went, like doctors.

I didn't know how they caught wind that Eleris was a wizard, but it sure caused quite the problem.

Like that, my plan of accidentally bumping into her and then just naturally including her into our party became impossible.

- Well, please take care of us well.

-Huh? I thought we already won her over to our side, though?

If we approached Eleris, who enjoyed quite the popularity among those adventurers, and asked her to go with us, and she agreed, I was pretty sure we would immediately provoke our competitors.

It became impossible to make her join our party quietly.

I even tried making eye contact with Eleris, who seemed unable to do anything surrounded by all those people.

"!"

I really wanted to pretend that I knew her, but I simply couldn't

'Your Highness! Help me!'

'How should I do that!?'

We could only communicate with our eyes in that situation.

"What are you doing?"

Ellen didn't know what was going on, so when she thought I was spacing out, she said that we should hurry to our room; however, I couldn't just leave Eleris behind like that.

I had no other choice but to use a more aggressive method.

"…Wouldn't it be pretty good if we had a wizard with us?"

"?"

Ellen tilted her head at my comment. I hadn't figured out how I should go about inviting Eleris to our party with all those people around, but I had to persuade Ellen first anyway.

"Why?"

Ellen tilted her head to the other side, as if she had no need for more people to join the party, even though there was a wizard right in front of her.

"No, I mean… It wouldn't hurt, right?"

"…That's true, but we won't be able to meet the conditions, though."

The place was overflowing with people who were willing to give her enough money to buy houses just to win that wizard over to their side. Ellen was asking if getting her on our side was worth enough for us to spend all our money on her.

No, she wouldn't really need any of our money. I couldn't explain that to her though.

"I mean, it won't hurt if we asked her once, right?"

“…Okay."

Ellen went up to the room first as if it didn’t concern her. She probably seemed to think that I wouldn’t succeed. I somehow had to push through that crowd to get to Eleris, who was exploding in popularity.

If Eleris, who had rejected all proposals, suddenly accepted mine, people would probably think it was strange, but I had to endure just that much then.

Just when I was about to push through the people that were causing an uproar around Eleris…

-Bang!

The door to the inn opened quite violently, and someone came in.

Everyone who had been shouting turned to look at the person who came in after they heard that sudden loud noise.

“They say there’s a wizard here?”

It was a man with an axe strapped to his back. He gave off a sharp, rough impression. After that person appeared in the inn, silence permeated its walls.

-It’s Hugson.

-Hugson?

-Why is he here? He’s the only B-rank around.

-That’s him?

People were whispering in quiet voices.

Hugson.

Austin had said there was a B-ranked adventurer in his party. He had also said that they were staying in the Lockhill Inn, where we should ask for Hugson if we ever wanted to find their party.

The man who came in seemed to be that Hugson.

-Ah, it's over.

-That guy will take her, won't he?

-Why is a B-rank even here…

- Why is he in St. Point…

Listening to them made me cringe a little.

Aah, that guy is a B-rank? He's so high level! Ah! Why did this happen? Why is a guy like that here? Damn it!

…I felt like I was about to go crazy just watching them.

Anyway, it seemed like being a B-rank was actually quite high-ranked for an adventurer.

He approached Eleris as if he couldn't even see the other people around him.

"Join our party."

He spoke to her in quite a straightforward manner. She seemed a little stunned by that.

"Huh… Pardon?"

"Join our party. You can achieve so much more with us than with any other party."

Of course, Eleris wouldn't be swayed by those conditions. She was waiting for me, after all.

Hugson seemed to find it absurd for her to choose anyone but his own party, so, without waiting for her answer, he grabbed Eleris's arm.

“Ah! H-hey! Excuse me! I—!”

“Just follow me.”

When I saw Eleris getting dragged away so roughly, I felt as if the string that had been keeping my reason together finally snapped.

“Hey, old man.”

“…?”

That motherfucker.

“Let go of her, will ya?”

Who did he think he was touching?

CHAPTER 153

Apparently, being a B-ranked adventurer was a title that held great prestige in St. Point, although I didn't know about other places.

Everyone was looking at me as if I had a death wish.

Even Hugson tilted his head at my words.

What did I just hear?

That was what he seemed to be thinking. The gesture was only cute when Harriet did it, if some old geezer did it, it was simply disgusting.

"Do you want me to repeat myself? Let her go."

"…Who are you to order me around?"

Hugson spoke to me in a commanding tone, looking down on me as he approached me.

"Then who are you to order her around and just tell her to follow you, even though she hasn't answered yet, geezer?"

You don't want to get ordered around, then why do you do it to others?

Well.

It wasn't anything special—humans want to just passively depend on each other, after all. I was similar, sometimes.

However, I couldn't stand it if someone did that to my people!

Eleris looked at me with a strange expression tugging on her lips.

It seemed that Eleris was the most surprised about my sudden actions, more so than anyone else.

“Do I need to wait for an answer? Our party can offer her the best conditions and the best results. There’s no need to even think about it.”

St. Point wasn’t a very large base, and according to Loyar, its surroundings were rather safe.

So it wasn’t a place high-ranking adventurers would go to. Hugson’s party was the highest-ranked party in the area. The others seemed to accept that as well.

In other words, someone from a big corporation came to scout a talent that was getting recruitment offers by countless small businesses, so why did he have to even ask for her opinion on that? Of course she would say yes to that offer.

Well…

After I thought about it, he was kind of right…

No.

It was different in that case, though.

It didn’t matter if he was part of some huge conglomerate or some rich second generation!

"Anyway, you can’t just drag someone away without asking for their opinion.”

“You… Yeah, Miss Wizard. So are you going to come along or not?”

“Ah…”

Eleris, her expression rather vague, looked at Hugson, who was glaring at her slightly.

“…I must refuse, after all.”

“…?”

At those words, Hugson and the people watching had quite bizarre expressions on

their faces.

That girl.

She turned down the offer of a large corporation!

For who does she even wait for her to turn him down!

That was what their expressions seemed to shout. Hugson stared at her, seeming as if he had never even imagined that his proposal would get turned down.

"…I don't know what rank you have as a wizard, but do you think you can afford to reject my offer?"

Hugson was asking if she was a wizard strong enough to demand such high prices. At those words, Eleris shook her head.

"I don't think that… But I hate people who act like you."

Eleris looked at me while gently pulling her arm out of his grip.

"Rather than someone who has excellent skills but is much too dogmatic, I'd like to work with someone… who may lack skill but at least asked for my opinion first."

And like that, Eleris directed the conversation to wanting to join my party. She declined that guy and—at the same time—added a natural reason why she would want to join me.

That's right. I didn't step in for nothing.

Not only Hugson, but everyone inside the inn was astonished at Eleris's declaration.

* * *

In the end, Hugson said that he didn't like it but couldn't force Eleris to join him.

Even if he managed to drag her away, Eleris wouldn't have joined his party, but Hugson still glared at me with an overbearing look, perhaps thinking that he lost the wizard he was about to bring over because of me.

"…You look like a rookie, but it would be better if you didn't act so unruly."

I was going to say something, but the look in Eleris's eyes told me everything.

'Don't talk any nonsense!'

That silent pressure forced me to just nod slowly.

"Ah yeah. Excuse me for being a rookie."

"…"

You were still alive because of Eleris, got that?

Hugson left the inn. Eleris then rushed up to me and reached out her hand.

"I'm Relya. Nice to meet you."

I had never met Eleris in that form before. She promised to act as if she didn't know me and that it was our first meeting, even if it was just to prevent Ellen from suspecting anything.

"I'm Reinhardt."

I noticed the envious eyes of the guys directed at me; it probably wasn't just because I managed to get a wizard to join my party.

* * *

Ellen had wiped her hair with a towel and slipped into her casual clothes, probably while I was causing a fuss downstairs.

And then, I brought Eleris into the room to introduce her.

"…You really brought her."

Ellen was a little dazed as didn't expect me to actually bring the wizard to our side.

"I'm Relya."

“…I’m Ellen."

They shook hands. Ellen seemed rather awkward as she didn’t expect to welcome another member into her party.

“I don’t know what conditions Reinhardt offered you, but… we don’t have the money to pay a wizard like you.”

“Conditions? Oh, I don’t need anything.”

“…?”

I explained to Ellen what happened downstairs.

Of course, Ellen still wasn’t convinced. It seemed strange that she turned down all those amazing conditions to join us, no matter how much I kind of saved her from a tough situation.

“Actually, I’m not really a high-ranked wizard… However, seeing how much those people offered me, it’s clear that they are expecting a lot from me… So I felt really troubled… Rather than getting treated preferentially, I feel much more comfortable working with someone on equal footing. People think that all wizards are Archwizards.”

It seemed that Eleris had already thought of an excuse.

If one received preferential treatment, people would have great expectations of one’s abilities. She said that she had been refusing every offer because she was afraid of disappointing them if she wasn’t able to meet their expectations later on.

“…That’s true.”

Ellen nodded her head slowly as if she had found her explanation plausible. Of course, she probably hadn’t fully loosened her guard yet.

“I can use some attack magic and some support magic.”

Eleris didn’t specify what magic spells she could cast. She only used vague expressions like, “some”, “a little”, and “to a certain extent”.

Anyway, Eleris ended up joining us, so I could stop worrying so much about unexpected situations occurring.

“By the way, how did you end up in that difficult situation anyway?”

I was most curious about that.

Wizards didn’t have ‘wizard’ written on their foreheads, nor did Eleris wear a robe or show off her magic.

How did people get wind that she was a wizard?

On the surface I was just asking her, but it was actually more like an order. Eleris scratched her cheek with a vague smile on her lips.

“Aah… Well, there were some people that had been bothering me, so… I punished them a bit with my magic… So… That’s all… I didn’t know it would turn out like this…”

It seemed like she used some magic to get rid of some guys who kept on hitting on her. She succeeded in driving them away, but when it got out that she was a wizard, things became even more troublesome.

Even Eleris didn’t seem to know that wizards were so sought-after.

“Do you have any plans on what to do from now on?”

Eleris changed the subject, perhaps because she didn’t want to talk about that anymore. She seemed to feel great shame reporting these things to me.

She told me to not get led by my temper, but she couldn’t even keep hers in check, and even ended up using magic.

Ellen shook her head when she asked if we had any plans.

“We were going to make our plans tomorrow.”

“How about we come up with something together?”

We sat around the table in our double room.

We came to the Darklands because we needed practical experience, so we chose St. Point, which was the safest place around there.

“Do you have a map?”

“Yes.”

Ellen and I opened up the map of the Darklands we had gotten from the Thieves’ Guild. Most areas were left blank, but they would continue to be filled out depending on how much progress the adventurers made.

The Exian Outpost was located in the westernmost part of the Darklands, and the eastern part was gradually getting explored.

The adventurer’ bases spread out like spiderwebs around the route the Allied Forces had taken towards the east, with the Exian Outpost being their starting point. If I had to use a different simile to describe its shape, it would be a tree root.

St. Point was one of the places seen as relatively safe.

The further north one went, the more dangerous the areas would get, and the deeper eastern parts were also very dangerous. Higher-ranked adventurers were probably pioneering those areas at the forefront. Of course, there was no reason for lower-ranked adventurers to go to those places, so there were some who went there so that they wouldn’t miss out.

Ellen and I also did some preliminary research, but Eleris definitely knew more than just the basics.

…And she obviously also knew more about the Darklands than any other adventurer.

St. Point was located to the south of the eastern advance route, so the area we would mainly explore was the south, not the north.

“Actually, the exploration of this area is almost complete, so it would be difficult to obtain any new information. There are no particularly dangerous areas, and at best, there are only requests to make a more detailed map of the area… Do you know how to draw maps?”

“No.”

"Not at all."

Eleris knew more detailed information than us because she got there long before us, which meant she understood St. Point’s situation a lot better.

St. Point was safe, so the only requests available were creating detailed maps of the area. However, none of us knew how to draw maps.

“As you know, this place is just a waypoint before Klitz Point, which would be a day’s journey going south. It seems that a lot of the area has already been pioneered, but there are rumors of demons appearing in its vicinity. There were quite a few eyewitness reports, or so it seems. Of course, there weren’t any casualties, though.”

A full day’s trip going south… Then we would reach Klitz Point. St. Point was just a waypoint, preparing one for the journey to Klitz Point.

The area around Klitz Point had been explored, but not completely. It seemed that there were some eyewitness reports of demons appearing in the area.

“And further south from Klitz Point… that’s where problems had been cropping up from recently.”

“Problems?”

Eleris nodded at Ellen’s question.

The Points were base-like constructs built by humans as they explored the Darklands that acted as supply bases for adventurers.

St. Point wasn’t too far east from the Exian Outpost, so they were still pretty close to each other.

St. Point was located south of the Eastern Advance Route.

Since its purpose was to enable adventurers to explore the South further, new Points would be built when they found appropriate regions for those bases as they

continued south.

Eleris placed her finger on the map. St. Point, that split off the Eastern Advance Route, and the other Points that were located along the way deeper into the south.

Als Point, the main base located deepest in the south, was split into three different bases, Als-1, Als-2, and Als-3. This might have been done to broaden the exploration area. As for the Southern Exploration Route, stretching from St. Point: Als-1, 2, and 3 made up its forefront.

Eleris pointed to the Als Point.

“Recently, we lost contact with the bases furthest to the south, including Als Point. A specific reason or cause for this has yet to be discovered. Rumors say that some adventurers set out to investigate, but it doesn’t seem like they have found anything yet. Speculations suggest that Als Point was probably attacked or destroyed.”

“…So what happened to the other three Points connected to Als Point?”

Ellen’s expression hardened, seeming to know that the situation was more than unusual.

“They must have become isolated.”

Als Point should have played an important role in providing supplies to the other three bases in the south. However, since the waypoint bridging them to the other bases collapsed, it was impossible to deliver supplies to the frontlines.

Therefore, the people who were at Als-1, 2, and 3 are probably isolated from everything.

For some reason, the waypoint had been destroyed recently, and adventurers went to investigate, but there hadn’t been any results yet.

“Unless one planned on staying in St. Point and only doing work around the base, the biggest request in all the other bases in the south is to escort convoys storing supplies for those isolated bases. The convoys also seem to contain material to reconstruct Als Point as well as supplies for the three Points further south.”

It was presumed that Als Point collapsed. However, the truth behind the incident had yet to be revealed.

It was still necessary to provide the three frontline bases, cut off from any normal supply road, with supplies as soon as possible.

Therefore, convoys were organized to deliver supplies to the three southernmost bases, and escorting those convoys was the biggest task available in the south.

There wasn't much one could do if one decided to stay in St. Point.

However, if one planned on leaving St. Point, treading into more dangerous areas, then the thing most requested was escorting convoys.

I looked at Ellen.

"What are we going to do?"

"…"

The choice was left with Ellen. Exploring the vicinity of St. Point might not be very tempting for Ellen.

"Let's join the convoy."

As I had thought, Ellen chose to do something bigger.

CHAPTER 154

Als Point had collapsed, and the three bases further to the south had been isolated. If the situation was left alone, then the destruction of that one Point could spread to the other three as well.

Therefore, the Guild intended to put together a convoy to restore the waypoint base while also providing supplies to the isolated bases. A large-scale supply convoy would soon start its journey. It was probably supposed to be quite large as well.

Eleris, Ellen, and I went to the Adventurers Guild branch in St. Point to apply for the corresponding quest.

That was where we received some pretty bad news.

“Ah, the convoy escorts are no longer accepting any new members. We already have the required number of members.”

As we were probably one step too late, the Guild Guide showed us an apologetic smile, as if they were feeling troubled after showing us the convoy escort member list.

One could clearly see that the list of about fifty people was already completely filled out.

“…”

Ellen stared at the list. The names and ranks of every member of the convoy escort team was written on it.

And the top name was quite familiar, although Ellen didn’t recognize them.

Written there in clear handwriting was: “B Rank - Hugson.”

“However, with the permission of Mr. Hugson, the leader of the escort team, we may be able to add additional personnel. You can find Mr. Hugson at the Lockheed inn.”

“…What?”

That B-ranked adventurer was in charge of the convoy escort team.

It was only then that I understood why people couldn’t go against anything Hugson said.

He was not only a B-ranked adventurer but also someone who had some form of authority.

Did the Guild give him this authority because he was the highest-ranked adventurer in St. Point?

“I-I didn’t expect for this to happen…”

Eleris did some research, but she also seemed puzzled that Mr.Hugson was someone with such authority.

“…What?”

Eleris and I turned pale, while Ellen just tilted her head, wondering what was going on.

“…Hugson is the guy we had trouble with earlier.”

“Ah.”

Ellen nodded her head, seeming as if she got the gist.

It was more than obvious that our request to get accepted as additional members wouldn’t get approved.

* * *

We went back to our inn and gathered together again.

"We could just go down there by ourselves, couldn’t we?”

“Hmm… You’re saying that we should go investigate the situation at Als Point ourselves, without the convoy, right?”

"Yes."

There had been a team of adventurers that went there before us, however there had been no news of them yet. It wouldn't be such a bad plan to go to Als Point ourselves to investigate and report our findings to the Guild separately rather than joining the convoy escort team.

“Making money is good and all, but there's no harm in moving on our own.”

We finally decided to give up on the convoy mission.

"To think that a B-ranked adventurer is someone so great. To be given enough authority to take on the role of an escort team leader.”

Eleris seemed quite surprised that the B-rank was actually higher than expected. Honestly, I was surprised as well.

After I thought about it, it was a pretty high ranking, wasn't it?

Ellen just mumbled with her arms crossed.

“He just became a big fish in a small pond."

I tilted my head at her quiet comment.

“What do you mean?"

“The road to St. Point is safe, so escorts or something wouldn't be needed. This escorting job had to have its origins in St. Point.”

“…Right?”

“It's actually a request only available in St. Point's Guild office. However, there aren't many well-paying requests in this place, so there aren't any high-ranking adventurers around. The highest-ranked adventurer in this place is that man called Hugson.”

In fact, Ellen also didn't think that someone of B-rank deserved to be put in the position of an escort team leader.

“So you’re saying that he got lucky by being here, essentially becoming a big fish in a small pond?”

“Maybe. Maybe not. He might have a connection to someone from St. Point’s Guild branch as well.”

"Hmm… I guess."

Hugson might be in close contact with someone from the local guild, enabling him to monopolize good requests, so he might have actually come to St. Point because of that. In that case, he was even assigned to be the leader of the requested escort team. Normally, that position would belong to a much higher-ranking adventurer.

Eleris and I nodded our heads at Ellen’s quite plausible explanation.

"And looking at the list, except for Hugson, all of the members were either D or F-ranked adventurers. Almost all of them are newcomers.”

“…Newcomers?”

Certainly, Austin had also bragged about being in the same party as Hugson. Ellen carefully looked over the list and seemed to come to a realization.

“What’s his reason for hiring only new adventurers?”

“There must be a certain budget allocated for this request. Low-ranking adventurers are usually paid less. He was probably planning on pocketing the rest.”

At Ellen’s words, my mouth opened in surprise.

If a total of 100 gold coins were given as a budget to the request as payment for the participants, if he let high-ranking adventurers join the escort team, he would get less money in the end, so he decided to fill the ranks with only newcomers.

He was pretty sure that the route they would be going down was safe anyway. Their purpose wasn’t to go to battle but to simply escort a convoy.

“Well… Ain’t he one hell of a guy?”

Aside from the fact that Hugson turned out to be quite the greedy individual, it had

nothing to do with us anyway. We had already decided that we didn't want to take part in the mission, after all. We wouldn't have any more business in St. Point after we left.

* * *

We decided to head towards Als Point, regardless of the convoy.

Since we hadn't had dinner yet, Ellen and I went somewhere to eat. After telling us that she had already eaten, Eleris went back to her room.

Of course, I already mentioned it before, but it seemed like it wasn't completely impossible for her to eat our food. However, she said that she wouldn't eat with us to avoid suspicion.

Although it had gotten quieter, as the wizard recruiting frenzy had ended, the first floor was still noisy because of all of the drunkards making merry.

-Is that him?

-Yeah.

-Huh… Why did she decide to refuse to join a B-ranked party and go hang out with some kid like him?

-Maybe she wasn't as good as she seemed to be.

-Well, even if she isn't skillful, a wizard is still a wizard…

From time to time I also heard some people talking about me appearing from out of nowhere and stealing away the wizard. I didn't really care about them. I would have to stay in St. Point for more than a week to deal with all those guys.

Ellen added three hamburger steaks and a lot of potato salad to her order, while I only ordered one steak.

"…Do you plan on eating those huge amounts here as well?"

Where the hell did her bottomless appetite come from? Ellen looked at me with a sullen expression on her face at my comment.

What!

That was what she was trying to convey.

“You’ll have to move around a lot more, so you should eat more.”

Woah, woah, look at her talking back.

“…You’re right.”

She was right that we should eat a lot. We wouldn’t have to replenish the preserved food we had gotten at the Exian Outpost here in St. Point.

Was that why she didn’t eat a lot while we were on the road?

“…”

Anyway, I had quite the problem.

-Another beer for this table!

-Yees!

Seeing the barkeeper pour the people drinks after they ordered made me think that he might pour me some as well, as long as I paid. Something like that was impossible to even think about in Temple, but wouldn’t it be nice if he just poured me some alcohol if I gave him money?

“…Should we have a drink?”

“…?”

Ellen only looked at me after hearing my words.

She didn’t seem to understand what I was trying to say at all.

“…A drink?”

“…I-I was just saying…”

I felt a certain sense of crisis that she might kill me as soon as I put some alcohol in my mouth.

She didn't tell me not to drink, but seeing her eyes telling me, 'What did you say?' scared me a bit.

…It hurt my pride a bit.

I-I mean, wasn't it completely natural to be scared of the world's strongest person, regardless of how much older I actually was?

Was it much uglier to make excuses for being pathetic?

Still, I was just afraid of Ellen sometimes, in a different sense than Bertus and Charlotte!

I was always getting beat up by her in the name of training! That was what one called a bully!

"Have you drank before?"

Ellen asked me something as she ate her hamburger steak. Of course, I had drunk. I had drunk a lot in the past.

However, I only had a single drink after I possessed this body—it was some unidentified sour drink that the beggars of the Rotary Gang drank.

However, alcohol was alcohol.

"…Why can't I?"

At my timid attempt at protest, Ellen shook her head.

"It's not that you can't."

"But not today," she said firmly while shoving the hamburger steak in her mouth.

"I can't drink?"

"If you're going to drink some, do it later."

So, I can't have any, huh?

"…With me."

"…Huh?"

She said something completely unexpected after I was about to feel really disappointed. I understood why one wouldn't want me to drink, but she had actually asked to drink with me later?

"I want to have a drink as well."

Ellen was probably curious about the taste of alcohol. To be honest, Ellen was sincere in everything she did, but she wasn't the type of person that advocated for people to live a righteous life.

She did her best with a given task, but she wasn't someone who pursued absolute justice. It wasn't so out-of-character for her to want to try drinking once.

I suddenly became very curious about what would happen if she were to become totally drunk.

While I was still surprised at Ellen's surprising words…

-Bang!

Suddenly, the inn door swung open, giving me some serious déjà vu.

What was with this?

Not too long ago, something similar happened.

Just like that time, the inn fell completely silent.

-Stomp, stomp, stomp

And unlike before, it was a group of people that came into the inn.

They were a group of uniformed people, fully armed.

The B-ranked adventurer, Hugson, was among them.

"…"

Austin was also among them, shaking and completely pale. He pointed to me without a word, and those armed people came to the table where Ellen and I sat.

I then realized what uniform that was.

"I'm St. Point Adventurer Guild Officer Zaler."

It was the uniform worn by the Adventurers Guild staff.

"Reinhardt and Ellen. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"Good."

The cold-looking officer confirmed Ellen's and my identity before speaking to us.

"I have received reports that you both are suspected of having partaken in robbery."

"…What?"

"…"

Hugson grabbed Austin by the shoulder.

Austin's complexion turned blue.

"Austin, tell me what you saw."

"Tha-that… That's…"

Fucking hell.

“If you don’t tell me the truth, your carriage will be taken away from you, you know?”

I pretty much understood what was going on.

Hugson was threatening Austin right in front of me.

“Tho-those two… Attacked the adventurers and the coachman when they were in the carriage… They extorted the wagon and their equipment from them…”

Austin was trembling with fear. The man who introduced himself as a Guild Officer came forward, pointing his chin towards Austin, and then looked at Ellen.

“We’ve already got witnesses. Are you going to cooperate?”

“What kind of…”

“Reinhardt.”

As I was about to go mad, Ellen called out to me. Was she worried that I’d flip out again and get dragged away to some place?

Ellen whispered.

“Take ‘that’ out."

That…

I immediately knew what she meant.

Oh, right.

It wasn’t really some magic tool, nor was it some great relic.

-*Rustle*

“…!”

It was an invincible cheat item limited to humans.

The Imperial Family's Crest was in my hands. Ellen also took out her Temple student ID.

"…Temple students?"

The Imperial Crest and the Temple Student ID, which guaranteed our identity as students of the continent's most prestigious educational institution, Temple.

Without even looking at the Officer, Ellen muttered as if they were just a passing nuisance while eating her hamburger steak.

"If you can afford it, by all means, take us."

How could she say "Get the fuck out of here" so gracefully?

The inn was completely silent because of a different reason that time.

"What are you doing?! Those are definitely fake!"

Hugson, who opted to simply watch the situation before, broke the silence.

"Hu-Hugson! Those items are something that would cause all three generations of your family to get executed if someone dared to create counterfeits of them!"

The officer called out to Hugson, who was suddenly coming towards us.

This wasn't always the case, but it would be incredibly troublesome and dangerous if it was found out that someone dared to do something like that.

"They couldn't have grown so bold that they resorted to something like that!"

That bastard was the type of person that would shout around with a bright red face if things didn't turn out as he wanted.

"Hah! You bastards, I only thought you were robbers, but you were actually traitors! Faking the Imperial Family's Crest and impersonating Temple students? You guys will be executed immediately!"

-Thud! Thud! Thud!

He began to stride closer to us, axe in hand, seeming as if he had lost control.

"If you move just a single step closer.”

Ellen muttered in a cool voice.

"You die."

“What?”

"You’re going to die."

Ellen got up from her seat and stared at Hugson, whose face had turned even redder.

I had never seen her like that before.

Silent anger was raging in her expressionless face. It seemed even more expressionless than usual.

Even though that rage wasn’t directed at me, I still felt a chill run down my spine. In fact, Hugson, who was about to draw his weapon, also backed away unconsciously when Ellen stood up.

“What? You want to have a duel then?”

Ellen stared at Hugson with a steak knife in her right hand.

“This is all I need.”

No one even dared to laugh at Ellen’s ridiculous statement that she would take on that axe with a steak knife.

The pressure she emitted made everyone think that she could really do it.

“If you don’t, then get out of here.”

That time, Ellen wasn’t as elegant as before.

The Imperial Family's Crest, the Temple Student ID…

And that mysterious confidence she was showing at the moment.

They were more than convincing.

However, if they were to touch her, they might get sent flying far away.

No, she might send them flying even before they could do that.

"…Let's go back, Hugson."

"…Tch."

In the end, they made the wise choice before taking that last step towards their death.

CHAPTER 155

Even after Hugson and the men from the Adventurers Guild left, the silence had yet to subside.

Of course, the reason for that was Ellen and me. The people who had watched the scene were slowly retreating to their rooms, cutting their drinking party short.

“It seems that the St. Point Adventurers Guild is in that guy’s pocket.”

It looked to me that the guild officer was treating Hugson as if he was his master or something. I had already finished my food, so I was watching Ellen as she finished eating the leftovers.

“…By the way, you sure have a temper.”

I was quite surprised because I didn’t expect Ellen to tell them that they would die. I had never seen her say such harsh things to anyone before.

“It’s better to simply scare him away than actually kill him.”

“…Your words certainly were scarier just now.”

If she left Hugson alone, he certainly would have given in to his temper and started attacking, which meant that she would have had to kill the guy, so she did this instead.

She put enough pressure on them to make them think they might really die, which made those guys actually withdraw. It was quite unbelievable, even though I had witnessed it with my own eyes.

“He was threatened, wasn’t he?”

Ellen seemed to be thinking about Austin, who had stood beside them, trembling and pale.

“…I guess so.”

Austin was a fresh F-ranked adventurer at most. He belonged to that B-rank Hugson's party, but that didn't change the fact that he was still a newcomer.

Austin had probably bragged about what happened earlier without knowing that we had some conflict with Hugson. He had told him about two rookie adventurers who had almost got robbed but ended up turning the tables and managed to rob the robbers. He probably told them about the sudden appearance of the carriage as well.

When Hugson heard that story, he seemed to have realized that one of those two rookies was me—one could infer as much if one heard a detailed description of my appearance and character.

So he must have put pressure on Austin when he realized that he could actually charge us with the crime of robbery. He would have said something like, "if you don't testify against them that they robbed those adventurers, then you'll be charged, and your carriage will be taken away".

So if he wanted to use it, he probably was told that he had to testify against us.

Through an Adventurers Guild officer, who was in charge of rewards and punishment, they tried to get us arrested or tried for the crime of robbery.

They probably didn't even imagine that they would get into deep trouble if they touched us recklessly.

"Fucking hell. He tried to accuse us of some crime just because I managed to get the wizard on our team."

"The biggest problem is that something like that would have been actually possible to realize."

If it weren't for those special items we had, we wouldn't have been able to defend ourselves, even if they treated us the way they did. I realized once again that we were in a lawless land.

Adventurers who could easily turn into robbers, there were people who could even control other peoples' lives by having connections to some mildly powerful people.

Seeing the lawless behavior displayed by the humans there, it finally sunk in that I was in the Darklands.

This atmosphere actually had nothing to do with demons.

“I was told that the humans were the scariest in places like this.”

That must have been something her brother told her as well.

* * *

Although it was Ellen’s first time getting involved with adventurers, she was well informed about their behavior—she’d probably heard a lot from Artorius.

It was Ellen who first noticed that we were about to be robbed when we were in the carriage, and it was also her who solved the conflict with Hugson.

It seemed that Ellen had already been well aware that the ones she should be most wary of weren’t the demons but the humans.

“…Do you want me to change rooms with Relya?"

“…No, I don’t trust her."

Ellen shook her head at my offer. She didn’t even want to share a room with Eleris. Ellen wouldn’t trust a person she had just met, after all.

So she decided that it would be better to share a room with me.

However, there weren’t enough beds for both of us to sit or lie down.

I noticed that before but had decided to not say anything. I thought I might get in trouble just by mentioning it.

The innkeeper had said it was a double room.

However, it obviously wasn’t.

“…I don’t think the innkeeper actually knows what a double room is.”

“Yeah.”

“Just because the bed is slightly bigger, he labels the room as a double room?”

"…"

There weren't two beds in the room but one bed that was large enough for two people to lie in.

However, because it was time to sleep, I didn't really know what I should do about it.

"…How about sleeping on the floor?"

"…You don't have to make yourself uncomfortable because of me…"

Ellen muttered softly at my words.

"No, I wasn't talking about me; I was talking about you."

Ah, I didn't know anymore.

Like that, I just lay down on the bed.

"…"

Ellen looked down at me with a cool look on her face.

Piece of trash.

That was what her eyes were telling me.

"…What? Shouldn't the strong be considerate of the weak?!"

Was I wrong?

It was only obvious that the strong should take care of the weak! She was the strongest there was!

So she should be sleeping on the floor!

Ellen pushed me with her feet as l was lying there.

"Get lost."

-Bam!

“Ouch! You crazy-!"

Ellen pushed me to the edge of the bed, then lay down on it herself. Did she just say something as hateful as ‘get lost’? Really?

“…”

“…”

My efforts to calm the atmosphere by spouting nonsense were in vain.

When we were lying next to each other like that, I felt uneasy.

There was no reason for me to feel so uneasy, but we had a long march ahead of us the next day! I had to sleep! I was actually very tired after traveling for thousands of kilometers!

Although we did that using Warp Gates.

“…Hey.”

“…Yes?”

After not being able to get myself to sleep, I called out to Ellen, who answered quietly. She seemed unable to fall asleep as well.

“What if they decide to attack us at night?”

Hugson had retreated for the moment, but seeing how he acted showed that he was very vindictive, so I was somewhat worried that he might come at us again deep in the night.

“Then I’ll actually kill him.”

Ellen had given him enough opportunities already, so she said that would really kill him. She wasn't really worried about him coming back to kill us.

Her words sure were brutal.

If anyone heard her, they would think that she had killed a lot of people already.

I felt that Ellen's attitude had undergone quite a change ever since we came to that dangerous place compared to the safe environment Temple provided.

I had to make sure not to stand on the wrong side of her blade.

Still, Eleris was there, and Ellen was also close to me, so I felt my anxiety greatly lowering

I was also just a person, even if I went there on my own two feet, I was bound to feel some anxiety in that place where one wrong move could cost me my life.

"Reinhardt."

"…What?"

Ellen spoke to me while staring at the ceiling.

"Thank you for coming with me."

"…"

It seemed like Ellen felt the same way as me.

If she had gone to that place on her own, she would have felt a lot more anxious, the same as me. It was a completely separate matter from one's personal strength.

"Are you saying that because you can't sleep?"

"…Whatever."

Ellen turned around as if she didn't want to listen to any more of my nonsense.

* * *

Fortunately, Hugson didn't come to cause trouble during the night.

The next morning…

I couldn't remember when I fell asleep, but when I woke up I felt something fluffy on my face.

It felt kind of soft.

Ah.

Huh?

"…"

That.

It was tight.

I couldn't believe something as cliche as that would happen.

My face was buried in something at the moment. No, it felt more like it was getting buried in something.

It didn't feel like I had crossed any lines yet!

When I slowly raised my head, I saw someone else's face before me.

"…"

Perhaps having woken up at the same time, I saw Ellen looking at me with a cold gaze, as my face seemed to have been stuck to her chest.

You.

What.

What are you doing right now?

She was looking at me with those kinds of eyes.

“W-wait a minute.”

“…”

“Wait. I don’t know what you think I’m doing, but… that’s not it, okay. Ah.”

“Forget about it.”

Ellen pulled up her collar, sat up on the bed, and then arranged her disheveled hair.

Then she looked at me, speaking curtly.

“Things like that happen.”

Why was she looking at me as if she wanted to kill me then?

If one shared a bed, things like that could happen when one tossed and turned! Ah! You hear?!

Damn it, no matter what I said, it wouldn’t make me look any better, so I kept my silence.

Ellen slowly yawned, then stood up and stretched.

“Let’s get ready."

Ellen should have screamed and slapped my face going by the usual developments found in fiction! However, she didn't give me that standard response. In fact, she acted as if nothing had happened and looked at me like that.

The development was romcom material. However, her response was not.

At times like these she should feel ashamed and shy, but she didn’t seem to feel that way.

Actually, I was pretty terrified that I might end up killed if I said anything wrong.

* * *

After getting ready for our departure, Ellen and I had some breakfast. Eleris also came down on time.

“Good morning, you two. I’m ready.”

“You have to eat.”

At Ellen’s words, Eleris smiled and shook her head.

“Oh, I ate something earlier before you came down. I’m ready to go.”

Eleris didn’t wear any armor like we did. She was just wearing a robe, not the simple dress she wore previously.

Rather than wanting to show off that she was a wizard, it seemed to serve to cover her from the sun. After a light breakfast, the three of us left the inn.

Our current goal was to get to Als Point to investigate what happened there. Of course, our actions would be completely useless if other adventurers had already reached the place and found out the truth, but there was no telling what might happen to them along the way.

We would arrive at our next destination, Kiltz Point, if we headed south of St. Point.

We would take a full day to get there.

Eleris probably felt pain, standing directly in the morning sun, but she didn’t make it obvious.

She had to be in pain, but I didn’t know how tolerable it was for her.

As if she noticed me looking at her, Eleris met my eyes and smiled.

It looked like I didn’t have to worry about her.

-There! Tie it tightly!

At St. Point, we came across a sight we hadn't seen before. Numerous wagons were being loaded.

"What's this? The convoy?"

"It should be."

Wagons were arriving one after the other from the northern entrance of St. Point. That was probably the convoy the escorting mission led by Hugson was for.

"Amazing…"

There seemed to be dozens of wagons coming into the base. Since there were a lot more people escorting the convoy, they would reach Als Point much later than us as well.

Seeing those kinds of things made me realize how cheat-like magic really was.

By casting Mass Teleportation just once, one could move all those supplies in one go without having to gather as much manpower in a much shorter time.

Of course, spells like Mass Teleportation were very high-level spells that could only be used by wizards on Eleris's level or higher. Even Eleris needed to chant for quite some time before she could actually cast it.

There shouldn't be that many wizards of that level on the continent.

That was why alternatives like Warp Gates were created.

However, one still had to replenish supplies in places where no Warp Gates or a wizard who could cast Teleportation were around.

By the way, I didn't manage to talk to Eleris alone, so I couldn't ask her anything.

However, if it was Eleris, she probably already knew what happened at Als Point. She just had to cast Teleportation one herself once, so she probably already investigated the incident, right?

However, since we had already departed, I didn't get a chance to talk to Eleris separately. Well, she might not have had enough time to find out the truth.

We passed the area crowded with countless wagons and headed towards the south exit.

On our way, we saw Hugson yelling orders from close to the Lockhill inn.

-Not there, this way, you bastard!

What a great personality he had.

Well, I was in no position to criticize him, though.

"…Huh?

And then I saw someone who was rushing about, probably on an errand, stop and look at us.

"…"

Then he just lowered his gaze and walked away.

It was Austin.

"Do you know him?"

Ellen softly nodded her head at Eleris question.

"Rather than actually knowing him, we're vaguely acquainted."

Austin didn't want to be accused of robbery himself, so he had accused us.

He probably did it due to Hugson's threats, but in the end, he was still his accomplice and accused us of things we weren't guilty of.

I saw Austin running away from us as fast as he could.

I actually felt more pity towards him than hate.

"…"

Ellen seemed to think similarly. She continued to look at Austin, who seemed to feel

too ashamed to face us.

"I wish I could have stopped you.”

Ellen took the lead, leaving behind those words whose recipient was unknown.

CHAPTER 156

In order to get to Klitz Point before heading towards Als Point, we had to choose between traveling through some rough terrain or along an already paved road.

If we went through unexplored areas, there was a possibility that we might make a new discovery, but our pace would be rather slow, and we would have to go through dangerous areas.

If we took the established roads, we would arrive at our goal the quickest, but we would have little to gain from that journey.

“Since Miss Relya is with us, it would be better to take the easier path.”

Taking the poor stamina of wizards like Eleris into consideration, Ellen seemed to have decided to take the established roads.

“Ah, I’m fine, really…”

Of course, it was pretty pointless for her to worry about Eleris’s stamina. I didn’t know how strong vampires were, but she was probably even stronger than Ellen at that moment.

Now that I thought about it, although her specialty was magic, was Eleris also capable of close-quarter combat? I had never asked her.

“The exploration of this area is almost finished anyway, so we wouldn't gain much even if we went through the rough terrain. So let’s just go.”

“Ah, yes… Thank you for your consideration.”

Eleris smiled.

She probably felt pain because of the sun, but it seemed like Eleris was pretty good at acting as if everything was fine.

We took the paved road south of St. Point.

“It’s none of my business, but those wagons probably won’t be able to drive easily on this road.”

“I suppose so.”

The road wasn’t very wide, and south of St. Point were some hills and mountains as well, although they weren’t very high. They would have to travel uphill and downhill multiple times.

I thought it would be pretty hard for a convoy with so many wagons to easily travel along that path.

Of course, we didn’t have any wagons or carriages with us, so we just had to walk. Ellen and I wouldn’t have any problems with that physically, and Eleris didn’t really need Ellen’s consideration either.

Of course, I didn’t feel completely comfortable because I was wearing armor, although it wasn’t a full set, and I even had a backpack on my back.

It was also summer.

“…It’s hot.”

After walking for some time, I said such. I then understood Ellen’s words that we would probably have died from the heat if we had taken a whole set of armor with us.

Of course, it was still more comfortable than the island survival mission we went through before. That place had incredibly high humidity on top of high temperatures, so it felt almost suffocating.

Although it was pretty hot there, the humidity wasn’t as high.

Ellen’s situation seemed to be a bit different. Although she didn’t look that tired, she still seemed to feel hot.

"Yeah, it’s hot.”

Eleris looked at Ellen and me, told us to stop for a second, and cast a spell on us after chanting for a bit.

“Oh.”

"It feels cool."

With a cool sensation spreading throughout my body, I could feel the heat leaving my body.

“This is a low-ranking spell called Chilling Touch.”

Although it would last for some time, Eleris smiled and said that she would recast it if necessary.

“…Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it. Small things like this are what low-ranking wizards are for.”

Ellen expressed her gratitude quite sincerely. However, Eleris just answered by humbling herself.

Also…

Both supernatural powers and combat talents were nothing like magic.

Its acquisition conditions were the highest, but in the end, magic was still the best! Even low-ranked magic was incredibly convenient depending on how one used it.

With the refreshing feeling of air conditioning on our bodies, we continued walking down the road.

The area wasn’t dangerous, so it was no different from hiking on a slightly uncomfortable trail.

Eleris picked up her pace a little, ending up walking next to Ellen, who was walking in front of her.

“By the way, what kind of relationship do you two have? Is it… like that?”

What?!

Why was she asking something like that all of a sudden?!

Looking at Eleris' expression, I could see that she had trouble hiding her own curiosity. I immediately answered.

"We're friends. Friends."

That's what I said. My eyes conveyed something different, however.

'Why are you asking something like that?!'

'Because it's interesting!'

Eleris couldn't hide her glee at the situation.

Don't make a face like a mother curious about her son's relationship with a female friend!

I thought she was going along with my setting. Was she curious about what kind of person Ellen was?

"Yes, we're friends."

Ellen looked at me as she spat out this answer at Eleris's question.

"So you two are close enough to journey together, right?"

Eleris, who seemed to be saying whatever came to her mind, didn't stop with her first question.

"Yes. I think so."

Ellen answered that question while looking ahead that time.

Phew, that was making me feel touched for no apparent reason.

* * *

After walking for a while, at around noon we took a break under the shade of some trees near the road and ate lunch. I didn't bring any tools for cooking with me, so all we ate was preserved food.

I ate some beef jerky and biscuits. Eleris also nibbled on a biscuit. I didn't know what it tasted like to her, but she still ate it. It also didn't seem like she was forcing herself to eat it.

Ellen was still staring at Eleris, who was eating and drinking some water.

"Miss Relya, you don't seem to sweat at all."

Ellen's sudden words made a chill run down my spine.

What was that? Did she know? Did she think that something was weird about that?

Certainly, Eleris, whose physical condition should be worse than ours, was completely sweat-free.

"I keep using Chilling Touch on my body. I also usually don't sweat that much."

As if Eleris had already prepared for the situation, lies were easily coming out of her mouth. After she cast her spell on us, we didn't really sweat that much either, so Ellen simply nodded her head at that.

She didn't seem to be suspicious of her. She simply asked because she was curious. Ellen didn't eat as much as usual because she wanted to ration the food. Of course, it wasn't really delicious enough to make one want to eat more of it.

"…It probably is usually like this, but there sure aren't any people here."

Ellen murmured softly as she looked from one end of the road to the other as far as she could see.

"It's a road one usually wouldn't have to use, except for a few people."

"I guess so…"

Although it was a road, it was only used by adventurers. It was probably quite natural that there were no passersby around.

Eleris tilted her head.

“By the way, the Adventurers Guild sure is amazing. I can’t believe they keep on building and maintaining these small towns and even rebuild them once they get destroyed.”

Eleris seemed to greatly admire the power of the Adventurers Guild. Ellen replied to her words.

“The Adventurers Guild is an organization run by the Empire.”

“Aah… Is that so?”

That was why that Adventurers Guild officer was able to speak the way he did yesterday.

“The Empire only supports its foundation; the exploration and pioneering are carried out by those individuals called adventurers. Both risks and rewards are very much individual matters.”

The Empire granted them financial support. However, the individuals called adventurers actually took on the risk to step into those kinds of danger zones on their own two feet. The territory in the Darklands secured that way would become a new village depending on necessity.

It seemed that one could also purchase powerful magical artifacts from the Guild as well.

Anyway, the original backer is the Empire, while the Adventurers Guild was like a subcontractor, and that subcontractor’s subcontractor would be the adventurers.

“Let’s get going.”

We would reach our next destination, Klitz Point, if we continued to walk all day.

“…The sky has suddenly become really cloudy.”

Eleris looked up at the sky and uttered those concerned words.

Eventually, after we set off again, it began raining an hour later.

* * *

-Shaaaaaa…

It wasn't just raining; it was raining quite heavily. The three of us continued walking, wearing raincoats we had prepared in advance. The road became very muddy as it wasn't a very well-paved road to begin with.

-Rumble…

"Uhm…"

Eleris continued to let out such noises as we walked, perhaps because of the bad weather.

"Uuhmm…"

No, it didn't seem like it was simply because of the bad weather.

"What's the matter?"

As Eleris kept acting like that, Ellen asked if something had happened.

"N-no, I was just wondering if the convoy's departure would be delayed because of this weather."

She seemed to think that the massive convoy wouldn't be able to cross those muddy roads.

"It doesn't have anything to do with you, so why do you care about that?"

"Ah… Tha-that's true, but…"

Eleris scratched her cheek, a vague expression on her face at my words.

"If the supplies arrive late at those three isolated bases in the south… It might be quite troublesome for them."

It seemed like she was worried about those other people because they might not get the supplies in time. The roads would be muddy as long as it rained, and the convoy might get delayed.

It seemed that she thought that the people and adventurers in those isolated bases might travel too far south and possibly die.

“For how long have they been isolated?”

“Uhm… As far as I know, for more than ten days.”

We would take one day to walk to Klitz Point.

To the next base, Als Point, we would take three days.

Additionally, the branches Als 1, 2, and 3 were located in places that would take four days to get to.

In other words, it was quite obvious that they suffered from a major food shortage. If the convoy didn’t reach them very soon, adventurers might end up dying, and not because of monsters.

It was just a concern, but something like a large-scale famine might really occur, as Eleris feared.

“That’s strange.”

Ellen, who had been listening to our conversation as we walked through the rain, tilted her head.

“If their supply road collapsed, wouldn’t it be better for them to go back to Klitz Point instead of just sitting there isolated from other bases…?”

It took at least seven days to get back to Klitz Point after passing the completely collapsed Als Point from the front lines. However, given that no information on the situation had been reported, it seemed that no adventurer ever went back to Klitz Point.

“Maybe there are some circumstances that prevent them from returning… At least, I hope it’s just that.”

Judging from Eleris's words, it seemed that she wasn't able to confirm Als Point's situation beforehand.

The people on the frontlines located in Als Point one, two, and three were isolated.

They would have no other choice but to return to Klitz Point.

However, the adventurers that went to investigate the situation of Als Point hadn't returned yet.

I didn't know they ran into some kind of trouble or if they were just delayed.

Anyway, I could only speculate that the cause for Als Point's collapse was at the heart of all those problems.

* * *

It was a day's walk to Klitz Point.

However, the sudden downpour delayed our journey, so we weren't able to reach Klitz Point's vicinity until long after the sun set. In the darkness, we had to move carefully, step by step, relying on Eleris's light magic.

"I think it's over there."

-Shaaaaa…

Standing on a hillside, I could see a dim light shining in the rain. Ellen pointed to that place.

"Fuck, I can't wait to get some rest."

Although I was wearing a raincoat, it had been raining for a very long time, so my shoes seemed to be full of water.

Ellen and I were exhausted from walking in the rain for such a long time.

We were getting closer and closer to Klitz Point. Its size should be similar or smaller to St. Point. As we got closer to our destination, we naturally increased our pace.

As we were walking towards that dim light, I felt like a ship that had finally found a lighthouse after having drifted astray.

However, Ellen, who had been walking before us, suddenly stopped us.

"Kill the light.”

"What? Ah… Yes!“

At Ellen’s sudden command, Eleris seemed puzzled at first but did as she was told and canceled her light magic.

It seemed that she noticed something strange, so I talked to her in a subdued voice.

"Did you notice something?”

At my question, Ellen continued to stare at that light through the rain.

“Why is there just a single light?”

“…What?”

A single light?

Ellen seemed to have noticed an abnormality I hadn’t even thought of.

“Klitz Point is about the same size as St. Point. However, this is just too different from the scenery we saw there yesterday.”

Prompted by Ellen’s words, I remembered the night view of St. Point I had seen the day prior.

It wasn’t anything to call home about, one couldn’t even call it night view, but one could still see light coming from multiple buildings. Looking at it from afar made one feel like looking at a village.

However, we could only see one faint light shimmering through the rain at that moment.

Strictly speaking, it shouldn't be just one.

It seemed like only one building was lit up. The many other buildings that should be engulfed in darkness were out of our sight.

Even if it was an inn that had its light turned on, there should be several, so it was weird that just a single one was lit up.

Even though it was night, not everyone would sleep at that hour.

"I think there's a problem."

The incident that had occurred at Als Point might have spread to Klitz Point.

"Let's take a different route."

We decided to leave the road we were on, with our breaths held, and approach Klitz Point from a different direction.

CHAPTER 157

Ellen was suspicious of everything she came across. I had just seen a light and thought about getting some rest quickly. Ellen, on the other hand, wondered why there was only one light.

She probably acted that way because she heard from Artorius that it would be difficult to survive as an adventurer if she didn't stay vigilant at all times.

We had to be wary of both monsters and people. Careless idiots would pay the price for their ignorance one way or another. The three of us left the road and approached Klitz Point from a different direction.

Unlike the relatively safe St. Point, Klitz Point had a type of barrier erected around it that seemed to serve as a prevention method against unexpected attacks.

The pouring rain and darkness severely limited our view. However, the weather was also hiding us from any potential enemy in the area.

Right when we were reaching the general vicinity of the area…

"Can you hear anything?"

Ellen asked me, remembering my strengthened hearing when we reached the barrier.

However, even after I strengthened my hearing, I could only hear the sound of falling rain.

"The rain is too loud. I can't hear anything else."

I tried to somehow catch any sound that came from the only lit-up building; however, any sound that might have come from there was completely buried by the rain. It was also too far away.

Ellen nodded as if she thought as much and then took off her raincoat and backpack.

"Ms. Relya, wait here. Reinhardt and I will be back in a second."

"Will you be alright?"

Eleris seemed worried, but Ellen only nodded her head to her question. Like Ellen, I took off my raincoat and backpack and followed her.

The wooden fence was about three meters high.

-Pack!

Ellen stabbed a knife into the middle of the fence. Then she applied some more force, driving it in till the handle.

"Let's step on this and jump over."

"Okay."

She wanted to use the knife handle as a stepping stone and told me to cross the wooden fence in the same way. Originally that would have been impossible, but my physical abilities were at a high enough level that I could manage to do something like that.

-Whoosh!

Ellen lightly jumped on the knife handle, grabbed the sharpened part of the fence like a lever, and pulled herself over.

One could never know what might await us on the other end of that fence.

A fight might break out.

Ellen had already crossed over. However, Eleris was just silently holding my hand still.

She didn't say anything, but I fully understood what she was thinking.

-Jump!

I lightly jumped on the knife's handle and crossed over the wooden fence as Ellen

had.

The rainy weather was quite in our favor in that situation. Any noise we would make would get drowned out, preventing anyone from spotting us like that.

However, we wouldn't be able to discern objects except for those that were close to us. All I could see was the light shining from that building located in the center of Klitz Point.

We didn't approach it immediately.

"Let's move slowly."

"Okay."

Ellen and I moved in a lowered position. Even in that darkness, there were still even darker places, so Ellen and I moved slowly, little by little, taking advantage of the darkness within the darkness.

-Shaaaaaa…

-Mumble… Mumble…

And as we moved further in, I started to hear something through the rain. It seemed that it was only audible for me after I strengthened my hearing, as Ellen was about to move forward again. I ended up grabbing her.

-It sure is raining like crazy…

A mumbling voice.

It was a person.

I whispered to Ellen after that person had gone by.

"It's a person."

"……"

We were in Klitz Point, in which most buildings were drenched in darkness.

Then there was a person who walked through the rain without a lamp or anything with him.

With that, we couldn't really find out if it was safe or not. On the contrary, things had gotten even more suspicious. Ellen whispered to me, telling me that we would move even more carefully.

“Let’s not get too close to that area yet."

It seemed that Ellen wanted to investigate the dark buildings rather than the lit-up building for the moment. We continued to move slowly because we couldn’t even see if someone was walking around in front of us.

We reached a wall of one of the dark buildings.

“Not to the door, the window.”

Ellen whispered quite curtly, leading to us following the wall of the building to one of its closed windows.

She carefully tried to open the window from the outside. Luckily, it wasn’t locked.

Ellen grabbed the windowsill and slipped inside the completely dark building, and I followed after her.

We couldn’t see a single thing once we jumped inside; however, it didn’t take long for us to realize something.

“Hup!”

“Urp!”

We covered each other’s mouths reflexively.

We didn’t even try to cover our own mouths but each other’s.

We both felt like we’d be fine but were afraid that the other would start shouting. After we realized that, we slowly reached out to each other.

The reason was simple.

Although we couldn’t see anything, we could still sense it.

“This…”

I nodded in the dark after hearing Ellen’s voice.

"It smells of blood."

It was a smell I knew.

Back when I was in the Demon King’s Castle, horribly disfigured corpses were strewn about everywhere—the air was pregnant with this smell.

* * *

We were inside that building where we couldn’t even see our hands before our eyes.

We couldn’t detect any sign of movement, but the smell of blood permeated the whole building. We could tell, even if we couldn’t see anything with our eyes.

That smell wasn’t just at the level of someone bleeding somewhere around there.

There was a corpse in there. Actually, a great number of corpses, so strong that the smell seeped into the walls. As I had already smelled something rather similar to that stench, I could guess that there weren’t just one or two corpses around there—they wouldn’t give off such a strong smell.

“There are corpses in here. A lot of corpses."

“Yes.”

Ellen nodded at my whisper.

It seemed that a massacre had taken place in Klitz Point for some reason, and it was most likely the work of the guys located in the only lit-up building.

Or they were people who locked themselves in that building when the massacre took place. Survivors. Even without talking with each other, we seemed to have come to the same conclusions.

"Let's get out of here. I can't see anything."

It was much darker inside than outside, and if we continued to wander around the building like that, we would only end up stumbling over one of the corpses.

Ellen and I went out through the same window again.

For some reason, a massacre had occurred at Klitz Point. We presumed that there were bodies in each of the dark buildings.

So who were the people in the lit-up building?

"The bodies haven't been buried."

Ellen whispered as she organized her thoughts.

Looking at the state of the bodies left unattended in the buildings, one could assume that they didn't view the dead favorably.

If they were survivors of an unexpected attack, wouldn't they have at least recovered the bodies?

"They are probably… either bandits or robbers."

So Ellen's suspicions were more than plausible.

Bandits or robbers.

They might have attacked the close-by Klitz Point. If so, it was quite logical to assume that Als Point, located further south from there, and the other Points connected to it, were also ransacked by those guys.

After they looted Als Point, they traveled to Klitz Point. It was more than clear why we hadn't heard anything of the adventurers that went down there to find out the truth behind the collapse of Als Point.

Those adventurers needed to go through Klitz Point to reach Als Point, after all.

They came across the robbers who had already occupied the Point and were killed or ran into them as they were heading towards Als Point.

Adventurers, who probably had to stop by Klitz Point, not knowing what had occurred here.

And the corpses left inside those buildings…

A small group of adventurers wouldn't be able to deal with such a large group.

Klitz Point had been completely occupied by robbers.

Having confirmed as much, we had no other choice but to come up with something else.

"Wait… What will happen when the convoy gets here?"

I could feel Ellen holding in her breath.

"……!"

Those robbers would let the convoy enter Kiltz Point, probably feeling like a pie just fell from the sky, kill all of the people, and take all the supplies.

There had already been a massacre, but there would be another one soon. Of course, there was an escort team accompanying the convoy, so I wasn't too sure how it would end, but it was rather obvious that a big fight would take place no matter what.

"We have to warn them."

I could only agree with Ellen's subdued words.

-Hey, hey! Hurry up and get a move on!

Then, I could hear a loud voice penetrating through the rain.

People were coming out of the lit-up building. Ellen and I hid ourselves around the

walls of the building we were close to and watched what they were up to.

All of them were rushing about with lanterns strapped to their waist.

“What are they doing…?"

The streams of people started to flow into a perfect structure, prompting us to lower our posture even further.

-*Bang!*

Then I heard the door of the building we entered not too long ago open loudly. Fortunately, we were much closer to the barrier, so they didn’t come towards us at all.

I focused on the sounds they gave off with my strengthened hearing.

It wasn’t just one person who entered that building but a group of them. I could hear their footsteps.

- Urg, it smells.

- Can we even clean this up? The smell will probably stay.

- We’ll just clean it.

- What about the bloodstains?.

- I was told to cover them up with rugs or leather.

.

.

They seemed to be trying to dispose of the bodies. It seemed like Ellen could also hear what they were saying as they were close by.

-By the way, it’s raining like crazy. Are you sure the convoy will come here

tomorrow?

Ellen and I couldn't help but feel our hearts drop at those words.

- They'll have to pass through here sooner or later. If they're delayed, the smell might have gotten weaker, and we have plenty of time to remove our traces, so ain't it a good thing?

-You're right.

Those guys already knew that a convoy was on its way. We couldn't help but understand why they decided to remove the bodies.

After disguising the place as if nothing happened there, they were going to kill all the members of the escorting team while they were distracted, resting at Klitz Point.

-If people end up assuming that this is the work of the Demons, we might be able to do this a few more times.

-What do you mean? Aren't you going to retire? After this one's over, Imma quit. I didn't earn just a penny or two. after all.

-You're naive, kid.

They weren't robbers or bandits.

They were adventurers planning to steal the Adventurers Guild's supplies.

They were just casually chatting about those things while moving around.

* * *

Ellen and I made our way out of Klitz Point and returned to the place where Eleris was waiting for us.

The more I heard those guys talk, the more unbelievable the situation seemed.

Ellen and I led Eleris away from Klitz Point without uttering a single word.

I had taken off my raincoat, so my whole body was really wet.

“What happened?"

“……It’s too complicated to put it in words.”

Ellen hesitated to answer Eleris’ question.

Klitz Point had been occupied by an unidentified group, and all the original residents had been killed.

That was why I thought they were bandits, but it turned out that they were some adventurers who got together and turned to robbery.

“Th-that means that the convoy that’s supposed to arrive here sooner or later is in grave danger.”

Eleris was flabbergasted to hear that a massacre had already taken place in the base and was terrified when thinking that the people with the convoy were about to face the same fate.

“They already knew that a convoy full of supplies would come here.”

They had already predicted the actions of the Adventurers Guild.

They predicted if Als Point fell, the guild would send supplies to rebuild the base, so they planned to loot it.

They even planned on disguising their actions of destroying Klitz Point and robbing

the convoy as the work of demons; they might even try to do it a few more times.

If all went according to their plan, no one would actually know if it was done by a band of bandits or adventurers. They might just continue to calmly work as adventurers, or they might simply disappear after one last big cue.

It was unclear if they would keep on being adventurers.

They would have to live, hiding that they killed countless people like that, and after some time, the memory of that incident might also just fade away.

“This is just… ridiculous…”

Eleris was so flabbergasted that she was unable to close her mouth.

“So it seems like all those who weren’t part of their group that previously occupied Klitz Point have been killed.”

Those guys wandering around the base seemed to keep a lookout for adventurers going to that place in order to catch them. If Ellen hadn’t realized that the place was suspicious, we might have been forced to fight with those bandit adventurers as soon as we entered.

The convoy wasn’t the only one in trouble.

It was clear that the group completely occupied the midpoint between Als Point and St. Point, so they probably also killed all the people that tried to go there from Als Point 1, 2, and 3—that was why none of the people ever managed to return from the isolated bases.

Eleris seemed prepared to leave us somewhere and do something about it herself. However, she wouldn’t act without my order.

It was unknown how many bandits had taken over Klitz Point.

However, I estimated that there should be at least 20 of them.

“We have two choices.”

Ellen calmly organized her thoughts.

“We could deal with them ourselves or go back and warn the convoy team.”

“…Do you want us to deal with them ourselves?”

“Yes. It might be dangerous, though.”

Ellen took the option of going directly into the bandits' den and beating them up into consideration.

Of course, Ellen was more than capable of that. However, those guys didn’t just murder one person; they had caused a massive massacre. I didn’t know if Ellen could handle all that.

No matter how much Eleris and I assisted her, she could die if she made a single mistake or slipped up.

“I think our best option would be to go back and warn the convoy team.”

Of course, Ellen also acknowledged that danger. The safest option at that point would be to go back and notify the others of the threat.

“But we talked about it, right? The list.”

“……Right.”

Hugson formed the escort team for the convoy entirely out of newcomers to increase his own income.

All of them were the newest of the newbies. If a fight broke out in Klitz Point, they might die without being able to do a thing. In the worst case, they might all run away.

On the other hand, the adventurers occupying Klitz Point were more than accustomed to killing, although we didn’t know their level of skill. I mean, they casually chatted while removing the corpses.

"Do we really… Have to take this risk?”

Eleris seemed a bit reluctant and negative about dealing with them on our own.

Out of all the aspects, the fact that she might end up killing someone with her own hands seemed to make her feel the most reluctant.

“If the news reaches them, the convoy might collapse just because the people start panicking.”

Even if Hugson was with them, all those newbies thought that they would just go down to the Als Points. However, there was a possibility that things would completely fall apart before anything even started, just because they had heard that a large band of bandits was waiting for them there.

That way, the convoy would completely collapse. I had no choice but to agree to Ellen’s words.

“If the convoy collapses, the only thing left behind would be… Right. Supplies.”

I realized something as I spoke.

The purpose of the convoy was to rebuild Als Point; however, it was also very important to deliver food and other supplies to the isolated bases at the front lines.

So they would have a huge amount of materials with them.

If the convoy collapsed, the adventurers stranded at those three points might starve to death.

Ellen was looking at the whole picture.

It would be safest to go back and warn the convoy team. However, the supply delivery to the Points would be delayed even further, so it would cause huge problems. If the Guild was informed that a massacre had occurred at a point and that it had gotten completely taken over, the Guild’s forces might get dispatched. However, for that to happen, they would have to report it to the Exian Outpost.

“Besides, if these bastards notice that things took a bad turn for them, they might run away to St Point and scatter completely. There’s no evidence for all this, after all.”

When they united, they became a band of bandits, but when they scattered in all

directions, they were just individual adventurers. There were no eyewitnesses or anything, so there was no way of proving that those particular adventurers were responsible.

We had only heard some voices as well. We didn't even know what those guys looked like.

I realized once again that the Darklands was a place that wasn't ruled by any laws.

In the end, dealing with them ourselves was the best option.

It was easy to make that decision, but what would come after wasn't as easy.

Both Ellen and I had to kill people. Directly, with our own hands.

It didn't matter whether they deserved to die or not. It was a completely separate matter if I could go through with it and endure the feelings that would come after.

However, I couldn't avoid dirtying my hands forever.

There would come a day when my hands would be completely stained with blood. I didn't think I would manage to reach the story's end completely untainted.

"Okay, let's do it."

"Yes."

If it was something I would have to experience anyway, it would be good if I got used to it as soon as possible.

CHAPTER 158

It was a rainy night.

It would make traveling a lot harder, but it was the perfect environment for what we were planning to do. The rain's noise drowned out anything else, and everyone's field of vision was a lot more limited than usual.

Eleris didn't object to mine and Ellen's decision.

The plan was simple.

Those guys were patrolling in the darkness; they probably did so to kill off any unsuspecting adventurers that stumbled in to prevent them from informing anyone else.

Fortunately, it seemed like we were the only adventurers located near Klitz Point, probably because of the bad weather.

Just like they made use of the darkness to stay hidden, we took advantage of it, along with the rain's noise, as well.

"…I'll use a Scroll."

Eleris took out a Scroll book from her robe.

"A Scroll?"

At Ellen's question, Eleris simply nodded her head with a firm expression on her face.

"It's a Night Vision scroll."

A Night Vision spell. There was no better spell for us in our situation than that.

With that, our mission became even easier. They couldn't see in the dark, but we could.

Also, about the Scrolls…

She was disguised as a low-ranked wizard, so she probably prepared them as an excuse in case she needed to use high-ranking spells.

The Scrolls Eleris was holding definitely didn't actually contain any magic. She was just pretending to use a Scroll while she cast her magic in secret.

She came up with a very plausible excuse. Scrolls were expensive, so she couldn't just use them willy nilly. However, if she wanted to use high-ranking spells and used them as her cover, she could just say that she had them as a form of insurance for emergency situations.

Eleris unfolded the scroll casted Night Vision on Ellen and me.

In a world of complete darkness I could clearly distinguish bright and shaded areas. It felt a little different from looking through an infrared camera.

It was a strange feeling, similar to when I first got underwater breathing magic casted on me.

My eyes weren't really able to penetrate through the rain, but I shouldn't have any problems in the darkness.

Ellen looked straight into my eyes and spoke to me.

"Let's go."

"Yes."

I didn't feel like my heart was about to explode. In fact, I felt rather cool-headed and my heartbeat was even calmer than usual.

I felt like I should be nervous, but I couldn't believe how calm I actually was about everything.

I speculated that it might be due to the 'Sacred Spirit' I received after Olivia's Quest. The description read that it would give me very high mental strength as well as resistance to mental magic.

I wasn't sure whether it had anything to do with it or not.

Anyway, I didn't think I'd make any mistakes due to tension or excitement in the state I was in.

Eleris decided to watch the situation from the rear. Once she had sorted out her internal struggle, she would join us.

When I looked back, I saw Eleris staring at me with sad eyes. It was a gaze someone would have used to send off a loved one to a dangerous place one didn't want them to go to.

While feeling rather complicated about it, Ellen and I used the knife stabbed into the fence as a stepping stone earlier that day and infiltrated Klitz Point.

The situation was different from before.

Due to the Night Vision magic, things that were indistinguishable before were very clear.

People with lanterns hanging from their waistbands were still walking around, seeing if all the bodies had been removed. They couldn't use torches because of the rain.

We decided to avoid that side for the time being.

We first lowered our posture and tried to grasp the situation of Klitz Point.

They were piling up the bodies on one side of the Point like luggage. We watched that scene from the darkness.

Just how many had died? There were about fifteen guys walking around and a total of five digging the ground.

It seemed that they planned on dumping all the corpses in a big hole and filling it back up.

I could also hear some sounds from inside the building as well. They were still working on removing all the bodies and bloodstains. However, it seemed that they mostly tried to cover up those with carpets.

They only needed to be able to fool the convoy team for a short time. It looked like they wanted to try selling the lit-up building as a type of inn.

There were a great many ways to get rid of some defenseless people, like poisoning their food or killing them in their sleep.

When I tried to count the bodies getting moved, I counted more than 30 corpses.

How many people had to die just for the materials transported with that convoy? Ellen and I pressed ourselves against the wall behind the inn, which we presumed to be their hideout, avoiding the people with the lanterns and the well-lit areas.

-Wahahahahaha!

-Ah, I wish I could take all this with me.

-Just do it, kid!

-Really?

* * *

While the others were working outside, there seemed to be a drinking party going on inside the building. Those people were probably the higher-ups of the group.

They were intoxicated, which would only make it easier for us to deal with them.

Ellen murmured to me in a low tone of voice.

“There are at least 20 people.”

“I think so.”

…About 20 bandits who were used to killing against a team of 50 newbies accompanying the convoy.

And they would be faced with a surprise attack on top of that.

It was clear that the convoy would get completely wiped out.

However, there were only two of us there.

They didn’t know that their enemy was lurking close by, but would we really be able to kill all of them in one night?

“Once their work is done, they will enter the inn. Let’s take care of them all at once.”

For the moment, we had no other choice but to wait until all the rats had gathered in one place.

* * *

We sat still in the dark until they completely finished their work.

I didn’t know how long the Night Vision spell was supposed to last. However, it was a spell Eleris casted, even if she disguised it as a spell contained in a Scroll.

That was why Night Vision’s effect still remained even after more than two hours.

Or she might have cast the spell on us again after its effect ran out as she was watching us from a distance, so we didn’t have to worry.

After some time, the guys walking around with the lanterns went back into the inn; that was when we took action.

-Shaaaaaaaa!

It was still raining.

"There should be one entrance to the north and one to the south. Let's start with the north entrance first."

The north entrance of Klitz Point.

There were two guards without a lantern standing there, perhaps to attack any unassuming adventurers trying to enter.

They seemed to be watching for any kind of light indicating wanders or adventurers coming close to the place.

If Ellen hadn't figured out beforehand that something was strange and told Eleris to cancel her light magic, those guys would have noticed us approaching the Point.

"You take the one on the right."

"Okay."

Ellen and I approached them slowly, each holding a knife.

"Cover their mouths and slit or break their necks. Don't give them room to scream."

Although it was her first time doing something like that, Ellen spoke as if she had already done it a thousand times. They were taking cover from the rain under a poorly made roof close to the north entrance.

-Are there even any people who'd want to come here in this weather?

-If they got caught up in the rain while on their way here, they would try to come here even quicker, don't you think?

-Didn't like three guys come during the day?

-I've heard Durtman whining about getting stabbed in the shoulder by one of em.

-That idiot got stabbed because he couldn't kill the guy in one go.

They were chatting calmly.

Ellen slowly slipped behind them.

We didn't just suppress them—

"Hurp"

"Urp!"

-Slash!

—Ellen and I attacked the two guards from behind at the same time.

I stabbed the nape of one guy's neck with my sharp knife. It was an eerie feeling.

I forcibly covered the mouth of a man desperately struggling to live. The feeling was completely different from simply cutting meat.

Ellen and I kept on covering their mouths until they stopped struggling.

Of course, even if a human's carotid artery was cut, they would still live on a little bit after that.

During that 'Wait-time'…

I clearly saw just how much blood could pour out of such a little wound in just a short moment.

Human beings could die awfully easily.

However, feeling a human's essence of life leaving their body with the blood pouring out at the moment of their death was just grotesque.

I desperately grabbed on to him until the guy I cut was about to die.

Don’t move.

Don’t scream.

Just die in this darkness.

I didn’t allow him any kind of freedom until he completely stopped moving.

As soon as I confirmed his death, I could just feel it instinctively…

I would never forget that feeling. Crushing that dying life under my feet felt so terribly eerie.

"Let’s clean up."

Ellen and I dragged the two bodies that had completely ceased all movement into the tall grass outside of the Point.

I had killed a man.

Ellen and I had blood all over our hands and clothes. It was only at that moment that I clearly felt that the Sacred Spirit skill was taking effect.

Normally, the moment someone experienced something like that, their hands and legs would shake incessantly. One would feel scared, nauseous, and want to sit down. However, I showed no such physical symptoms.

I was just extremely confused.

That was the moment the fear that I was capable of something like that so calmly swept over me.

Ellen looked straight at me.

Her eyes were still calm. I couldn’t feel any kind of excitement or confusion in them.

Ellen just put her hands on my cheeks and brought her face closer to mine.

“Don’t think about it now.”

She looked straight into my eyes. It wasn’t the time to think about it.

“Let’s do what we have to do."

Ellen’s deep, calm eyes that seemed like a tranquil lake erased all the remaining confusion from my mind.

Thinking about it could be confusing, and it could even feel scary.

“Yes.”

However, I resolved not to think about any of it for the moment.

* * *

There were two guards at the south entrance as well.

We killed these two people positioned by the south entrance in the same way as we did with the guards at the north entrance and dragged them into the thick grass outside.

Kiltz Point had already been completely seized by the darkness. All the other guys were in the inn.

There were no members patrolling outside. So I brought Eleris, who was waiting outside the Point, inside.

“We have to finish everything before the next shift of guards arrives.”

“…Yes.”

Eleris had a dark expression on her face when she saw the corpses outside while entering the Point.

They wouldn’t let the same guards keep watch for the whole night, so there surely would be others to replace them. I didn’t know how long each shift was, though.

However, that was the time we had to kill all the people in the inn. Things would be

easy if all of them were just peacefully sleeping in their beds. There might be some night-owls among them, however.

The rats were in the trap.

We just needed a way to kill all those rats.

We could surprise attack those that were holding that drinking party, but that battle would be very different.

An all-out fight wasn't something out of Ellen's expectation, but I would keep that as a last resort if possible.

If there was a way to subdue them without fighting them head-on, that way would always be the better option.

If Eleris used her true power, she could do that with a single magic spell, but that was out of the question. If we wanted to use magic, Eleris would have to hit all of them at once only by using some low-ranking magic spells.

It was pretty much impossible to just go in and fight them. Regardless of whether it was actually possible or impossible, the risk was just not something we could take.

Eleris gave us a fairly simple answer.

"Why don't we just set the building on fire?"

Set the inn on fire.

"It's raining, though?"

Ellen tilted her head as if it wasn't really possible. Due to various circumstances, almost all the buildings in the Points were made out of wood. However, it was raining at that moment.

"The most dangerous thing in a fire isn't the fire itself but the smoke."

"…That's true."

People usually died in fires not by burning alive but by suffocation due to the smoke.

“Couldn’t they just run out of the door?”

That time it was me who posed that question, and Eleris shook her head.

“That’s what I’m aiming for.”

Eleris pointed at the entrance of the inn.

“Among the low-ranking magic spells, there is one called Dig. It’s a spell used to dig the ground quickly.”

Dig.

…A spell that enabled the fast creation of holes in the ground.

“I’m pretty sure they will try to escape through the front entrance if we set a fire. We’ll just have to make a big hole before the door.”

They would try to escape if they noticed the fire. They should be completely out of their minds and just run out the door without looking at where they set their feet.

Eleris dug a huge pit in front of the inn’s only entrance—they would all end up falling into that pit while trying to escape.

Eleris had to do two simple things in the time limit we had set, nothing like casting a high-ranking destruction magic spell like Firestorm or anything.

Set a fire…

Dig a bit…

Eleris gave us a solution for our problem in the blink of an eye.

CHAPTER 159

Ellen stood by in case some guards left the inn for their shift while Eleris and I wandered around Klitz Point.

We were looking for supplies.

The Point was the size of a small town. So there were inns, guild offices, and shops.

All the people that should have been in those places probably all got killed.

"…Your Highness."

"…Yes?"

Eleris was speaking more comfortably without Ellen around.

"…Are you disappointed in humanity?"

Eleris chose humans over demons.

However, she was asking me if I was disappointed in it after I had seen some of the ugly sights of humanity. Eleris already knew a lot about that ugly side—that was why she seemed to feel a little despaired taking in those sights.

She had gotten angry during the slave trade incident, but it didn't seem like she just suddenly gained awareness of that side of humanity at that moment.

Eleris seemed highly concerned that I lost faith in them after I saw that form of humanity.

"What's good is good, and what's bad is just that, bad."

Some people lived virtuous and good lives, and some lived evil and ugly lives. Some people even stood in the middle or swayed between those two sides.

"Some of them are good, and some of them are evil. Not all of them can be just good."

Why would I be disappointed in the whole race just because there were some bad people among them?

Bad people are just bad; that doesn't mean all of humanity is bad.

On the other hand, good people are just good, but that doesn't mean all of humanity is good.

Good and bad could only be attributed to individuals. The whole species couldn't be attributed as good or bad just because one group of them fit those terms.

Therefore, even if I was a real demon, I couldn't be disappointed in the species as a whole by such sights. Some of them were just like that. They were just crazy bastards—that was how I thought of it, at least.

So those guys had to die not because they were human but because they were crazy bastards.

"…I was being presumptuous, Your Highness. My apologies."

Eleris smiled at my words as if she had worried for no reason.

"Let's just do what we have to do."

"Yes. Your Highness."

At that moment, Ellen's words flitted through my mind.

It wasn't the time to think.

* * *

Eleris and I went to a nearby tool store and packed all the flammable materials we could find. I couldn't really differentiate what was and wasn't, so I left it to Eleris while I just placed it in my backpack.

We also took a bow and arrows with us at Ellen's request.

When we got back, Ellen pointed towards the inn.

“We can enter the kitchen through that window at the back of the inn. The fire would go out if we did it from outside, so we should lay it in there.”

“I’ll take care of setting the fire.”

It was my job to enter the kitchen and set the fire. In the meantime, Eleris would make the pit by using her Dig spell in front of the entrance of the inn. It should be deep enough that they couldn’t climb out on their own.

“I’ll take care of the ones who try to escape through the windows or other channels.”

Ellen, who had the highest individual combat power, would handle those who wanted to escape through other routes and not the entrance.

I headed to the back of the inn, carrying a bunch of flammable substances.

When I got to the window leading to the kitchen, the wooden frame wasn’t locked, and the lights were turned off inside.

It was a bit high up, but I managed to get inside after throwing my bag with the substances inside.

Then I opened the stopper of each bottle and poured its contents in all directions. It seemed to be some kind of oil. There was also something among them that smelled like alcohol.

After spreading all the contents of the bottles across the kitchen, I went outside.

…Just in case an explosion occurred.

There was a reason why I took the role of setting the fire.

Ellen couldn’t see what I was doing as I was behind the inn.

I grabbed the pendant hanging at the height of my chest.

The Flame of Tuesday.

At first, sparks about the size of a lighter flame came out. I'd rarely used the artifact. Before then, I had almost no use for the powerful magical relic.

I actually had used it only once before then.

Eleris could create a firestorm that would pierce the skies with it.

It would create a flame proportionate to the user's magical power.

Compared to my peers, my magical power seemed to be quite strong, and my growth rate was also very fast. Since I had acquired the talent of mana manipulation, I should have been able to unleash an even more powerful flame.

However, while magical power was important, there was something even more important.

'This is an artifact that responds to the darker emotions, causing a greater flame if one were to use it against someone while holding malicious intent.'

Eleris had said that the relic was by no means anything good, as she advised me as such while handing it to me.

It was the first time I used it in an offensive way.

I would use it to kill someone.

I would use it to kill more than a dozen humans that were in that building.

I shouldn't worry about at the moment.

I had to put off my thoughts for later.

They had to die, that was all.

With those kinds of feelings swimming in my heart, I held the Flame of Tuesday.

Flames sprung out.

A huge flame to kill those bastards that were worse than any demon.

No,

Wait a sec.

If I did that, wouldn't my self-suggestion get triggered?

-*Flare*!

At that moment, I felt like I would be in trouble.

-*Fwooosh*!

"Huge!"

The flame immediately engulfed the entire kitchen and reacted with the flammable substances, creating a flame that came closer to an explosion.

I instantly sprinted backwards and rolled on the floor.

"Urgh…"

After I rolled on the floor, I was able to witness what I had done.

-*Frrrooooh*!

"This is… Crazy."

One side of the entire inn was completely engulfed in huge flames.

I didn't know if it was because the Flame of Tuesday exerted a lot more power than I expected or if it was the reaction with the flammable substances that caused it, or maybe it was the synergy between my supernatural power and the Flame of

Tuesday.

Maybe all those aspects led to that.

-What's happening!

-Fireee!

Anyway, it was a huge success.

* * *

I almost set myself on fire with my own flames. The fire that was supposed to slowly spread to the rest of the inn, starting from the kitchen, ended up spreading to the other parts of the inn at a tremendous speed.

The pit trap in front of the entrance had been completed already.

A huge pit with a diameter of about 5 meters had been created in front of the entrance after multiple casts of Dig.

Since it was considerably deep, they wouldn't be able to escape from it without help.

-*Bump*!

"Aaargh!"

-*Baam*!

Those who tried to escape the inn because of the fire and smoke began to fall into the pit before they even knew it.

Completely oblivious to the trap, all of them fell into it one by one as they were trying to outrun the smoke in utter disorder. If they were unlucky, they might have broken their necks and died immediately.

-*Craaaaaash*!

Some of them broke through the windows of the burning inn, taking deep breaths and trying to jump into the rain.

-*Swish*!

“Kehk!”

However, Ellen began shooting down the guys sticking their heads out of the windows with her bow.

Ellen wasn’t skilled enough with a bow to hit running beasts with her arrows like Delphin Izadra, but she was still able to shoot at any number of slow-moving targets.

Arrows once shot to win Redina a doll were killing a man with each shot.

-Outside! There are some bastards out there!

Someone had become aware of the bow-wielding enemy outside, but it did him no good in the chaos.

“Kehk! Kehok!! Kehok!”

As people started falling down into the pit one after the other, the ones still inside the building started to realize that there was a trap in front of the entrance that one couldn’t get out of easily.

However, the inside of the building was filled with smoke. If they didn’t escape quickly, they would suffocate and die, but if they wanted to go out using the entrance, they would have to jump over a huge pit of five meters in diameter.

They were stuck between a rock and a hard place.

-The windows! Leave through the windows!

There were some among them who could still think clearly in the midst of flames and smoke. Perhaps some of them had quite the mental strength as well.

There were some on the first and second floor who crashed through the windows

and popped their heads out.

* * *

-*Shing*

Then Ellen and I drew our swords.

“Kehoohk! Cough! Gasp!”

However, those guys who had just escaped without even being properly armed were unable to see us because they inhaled too much smoke and panicked.

-*Swish*!

Ellen ran towards the adventurer from their blind spot and killed him with a single stroke. She was like a ghost, killing with no hesitation.

I didn’t stay still either.

-*Puk*!

“K-kuhuk!”

The sword I received from Temple was of considerable quality.

It was really easy to kill those people who were trying to escape and couldn’t pull themselves together.

It almost felt like killing big ants.

Thinking as such, I put my sword in the back of my opponents who weren’t even able to resist, ultimately killing them.

There was a massacre right in front of the burning inn, and those who were supposed to do the slaughtering were getting slaughtered by just two people.

By the time the fire raging around the inn was extinguished by the pouring rain, our mission had been completed.

“Phew…”

I wiped my forehead with my trembling hand after we were done with the slaughter that almost felt like hard labor.

I’m tired.

That was the only thought I had when faced with that sea of blood and death.

* * *

Even if we managed to do it by making a three-person surprise attack on them, we still succeeded in killing the whole group of twenty bandits.

Ellen and I were covered in blood.

Even though it was raining, the bloodstains didn’t wash off so easily.

Not all of them were dead.

“He-hey… Sp-spare me…”

“Wh-why are you doing this… why…”

The guys who fell into the pit were mostly alive, although some of them were more or less injured. It was more than four meters deep, after all. It was impossible to climb up for them, and three of them seemed to have died, probably because they broke their necks.

Ellen and I were peering into the pit.

They seemed to have realized that they had fallen into a trap, that most of them were dead, and that their survival depended on our choices.

I didn’t want to let them live.

However, it wouldn’t be such a bad idea to keep a single one of them alive.

“Wouldn’t it be better to keep one alive?”

I though we should leave at least one witness alive for when we reported our findings. Ellen nodded slowly at my words.

"If we want to report this to the guild, we’d better do that.”

I took out my sword from my waist and threw it into the pit.

“Kill each other.”

I looked down as I spoke curtly to them.

For just a brief moment, they didn’t seem to understand the situation they were in.

“You’re Hi-…! Wh-what on earth are you doing?!”

When Eleris realized what I had just done, she almost made a mistake.

Ellen looked up at me with a look that seemed to ask if that was really necessary with her eyebrows furrowed.

“Why did you do this?”

I separated my gaze from the pit, looked at those two bewildered faces, and smiled.

“It’s better if we let these pieces of garbage take care of each other rather than killing them with our own hands.”

I just made them do the deed on their own, as I didn’t want to feel that disgusting sensation anymore. I didn’t want to do it with my own hands.

Those who understood what I was trying to convey started groping around the dark floor, looking for the sword I had thrown in there.

-*Puk! Puk! Puk*!

“Arg! Aaarg! Y-you bastard! How dare you!”

“Aaaaaah! Help me! Spare me!”

They seemed like incompetent bastards.

In the end, I was able to confirm that there was no such thing as camaraderie or companionship among those guys.

After some time…

“I… I’m… I… I-it’s me! I’m still alive! I’m alive!”

There was only one survivor shouting in that pit of hell. Ellen watched the jubilant demeanor of the last survivor who had killed all her colleagues.

“Let’s fill it up. I don’t feel good looking at this.”

Ellen seemed to have lost all interest in saving that person when she saw that scene. Her eyes held disgust as well as contempt.

“A-aah! Ah! Y-you promised! That’s different from what you promiiiiiiiiiised!”

-*Crush*!

Eleris filled up the pit she had dug up. The survivor was immediately buried alive, so I couldn’t hear her anymore.

“Reinhardt.”

Ellen was still looking at me.

Then, she suddenly grabbed my hands.

“Don’t do things like this."

Ellen and I both had hands miserably covered in red blood.

Her statement had no subject, but I knew well enough what Ellen was trying to say.

The madness brought about by slaughter, violence just for the sake of relieving one's own anger.

Ellen seemed to be afraid that I might fall for such emotions. From how I looked, Ellen seemed to feel that I was about to fall for that madness.

-*Shaaaaaaaaa…*

The fire was extinguished, and everyone but us died.

"…Okay."

I nodded while holding Ellen's cold hand in the rain.

* * *

The situation was settled.

However, there was not a single witness left alive to testify to the bandits' actions.

If we reported to the guild that something like that had happened and we were the ones to clear up the situation, they might recognize it as an achievement. Of course, they would probably impose private sanctions on us, but it could be said that the situation was rather unavoidable.

"If we report this and something goes wrong, we might get blamed for this."

Of course, there was enough evidence scattered everywhere, but there was still a possibility that we covered all of it up. I still had the Imperial Family's Crest, but I wasn't sure whether I'd be able to solve this situation with only that.

Ellen pondered, and—as if she had just come to a decision—she alternated between looking at Eleris and me.

"Let's go back to St. Point."

Going back to St. Point…

"There's something I want to check."

Ellen didn’t tell us what she was thinking.

However, since I had met her, I never had a problem with just listening to Ellen.

Ellen began to rummage through the corpses.

"What are you doing?"

“Adventurer IDs."

Ellen didn’t destroy the corpses but began to retrieve their Adventurer IDs.

“Gather all you can find.”

Ellen, Eleris, and I began rummaging through the corpses and the burnt inn out of the blue.

CHAPTER 160

It rained all night, and we had to return on a much more muddy road. I was absolutely tired, but I couldn't sleep because of the rain.

We took turns compiling a rough outline of events that we would report to the guild.

"It had to be those guys who attacked Als Point. They knew that if they attacked Als Point, an important supply base, the guild would organize a large convoy to support the Points at the frontier."

Ellen nodded.

The Adventurers at the frontline had no idea what was going on because they went up to Klitz Point after destroying Als Point.

"And the adventurers who traveled down here to investigate what happened at Als Point, and those from the isolated Points who decided to return, probably were all killed."

Anyone who went there, whether they came from the south or the north, were all killed. So no one knew what actually happened. Adventurers had no other choice but to use the route going through Als Point and Klitz Point to be the most time-efficient, so they would helplessly fall into that trap, not knowing that bandit adventurers were waiting for them.

"Just how many people did they kill? Only for the sake of money…"

Eleris lamented and muttered quite spiritlessly. They destroyed two Points and killed all the adventurers that were in them or came to them.

No matter how many supplies they would have been able to acquire, would it really be worth the countless lives they robbed of others?

Ellen shook her head.

“They didn’t just do it for the supplies.”

“…Were they aiming for all those adventurers’ possessions as well?”

“I suppose so.”

“I noticed that they kept quite a bit of their loot in the inn. Not all were burnt, so we could use that as evidence.”

There were no witnesses, but the loot remained as evidence. Ellen seemed to think that if we used that stuff, our report wouldn’t be seen as a complete lie at least.

As we had been walking all night, we could see the sky gradually getting brighter.

"We’re almost there.”

We returned to St. Point around the same time we started our journey the previous day.

There were numerous wagons waiting at St. Point, as one could see from afar.

The rain probably prevented them from leaving.

“Let’s go to the Guild office immediately.”

Ellen said that she had something she wanted to check.

We went to St. Point’s Adventurer’s Guild branch as soon as we arrived. The present clerks seemed a little freaked out when they saw us.

Ellen and I were covered in blood, and that fact didn’t change even if we were drenched by the rain.

“It’s an emergency. Please call an officer.”

Ellen immediately asked for an officer.

* * *

The guild officer who tried to persecute us last time showed up as soon as we prepared to wait. Perhaps because of our appearance and behavior, not only that officer but also some guards employed by the Adventurers’ Guild surrounded us.

"What’s going on? You said there was an emergency?”

The uniformed officer looked at us with furrowed brows.

It seemed that he believed that we just came back after going through something outrageous. Ellen shook her head.

“It’s a matter concerning the convoy. I think Mr. Hugson should also be here.”

“…Mr. Hugson?”

“Yes.”

He had already seen that we were in possession of the Imperial Crest.

With that in mind, the officer pondered for a bit and then ordered someone to call Hugson.

After some time, Hugson came to us as well.

“…Who are you to order me to come here?”

Unaware that it had something to do with him, Hugson looked at us with a very displeased expression. Because of the weather, the schedule of the convoy had changed, so he still seemed to be very annoyed about that.

Ellen slowly began to explain.

“Our group left St. Point for Klitz Point yesterday.”

Hugson's expression twisted slightly at those words.

"Yeah, what about it? Why'd ya come back?"

"Klitz Point had been occupied by a gang of about twenty bandit adventurers, and all the people originally living there had been killed."

"…What?!"

"!"

Their faces looked as if Ellen's words had struck both Hugson and the officer over the hand. Everyone inside the Guild was very quiet as well. Completely speechless in astonishment.

Not only Als Point, but Klitz Point as well. What's more, robbers? Ellen spoke while looking at Hugson with a slight smile.

"We killed them all last night; then we decided to come back to St. Point to report about it."

There was a gang of bandits.

However, they were all killed.

"What? What are you… by small brats like you?… What nonsense…"

Hugson frowned, thinking we were blowing one outrageous bluff.

"See for yourself."

Ellen took out a collection of ten cards from her chest and put them on the table.

Some were still soaked in blood, and some were relatively unscathed.

"That-that's…!"

Both the officer and Hugson opened their eyes wide as soon as they saw all the ID cards we had brought along.

“I couldn’t retrieve all of them, but these are some of those bandits’ Adventurer ID’s.”

I was wondering why she suddenly started searching their bodies, so it was to have some evidence backing us in case people didn’t believe us. She didn’t get all of them, but she still had more than ten of them.

“…S-so you guys really…?”

“Yes.”

The officer’s eyes were shaking violently. Just hearing that we took care of such a huge bandit group was ridiculous. However, there was evidence backing that absurd story right in front of him. Evidence that our group of three had really exterminated all those bandits.

Ellen said that she came to St. Point because she had something she wanted to check.

“You don’t seem to be very good at controlling your facial expressions.”

“…What?”

Ellen stared coldly at Hugson, pointing at the various Adventurer’s IDs.

“What? Do they look familiar?”

It seemed that Ellen got her answer.

* * *

An Accomplice.

Ellen suspected that the convoy leader, Hugson, was the bandits’ accomplice. Everyone was startled at Ellen’s unexpected words.

Wha-what… What nonsense is this?”

“They knew when the convoy would be leaving today, on the dot.”

Ellen noticed something very suspicious in those words we had overheard.

“Of course, the convoy’s schedule isn’t exactly a secret. They could have heard it from one of those adventurers that wandered into their arms and got themselves killed. Yes.”

The fact that the bandits knew the convoy’s schedule wasn’t any conclusive evidence on its own. However, there was one more suspicious part.

“By the way, all the members of the convoy, except you, are all E or F ranked adventurers. Most of them are people whose skills aren't worth considering. You must have had some purpose behind this.”

The composition of the escort team.

When Ellen and I first saw that list we had thought that he was doing that to line his own pockets even more, we had both agreed on that.

However, if we were to add the information that bandits were waiting in Klitz Point, Ellen began to suspect something else.

Wasn’t he just filling the group with easy-to-kill guys? They would be very easy to kill if the whole group was only made up of newbies who couldn’t even be compared to those bandits.

He didn’t even feel any remorse about getting the dozens of convoy members, the escort team included, completely eradicated by that group that had already committed massive massacres.

There were two suspicious aspects.

“And the look on your face after you saw that ID.”

Ellen pointed to Hugson’s face, revealing it to be the last piece of evidence, which was the thing she wanted to check.

“I’m sure you’re their accomplice.”

Hugson was unable to retort to her words.

The guild officer's lips were trembling.

"M-mr. Hugson… Tha-that's… your brother… Hudson's ID… but…"

The guild officer's face seemed as if he was hoping that the puzzle pieces swirling around in his head wouldn't fit together.

Seeing that scene, it seemed like the officer wasn't in the know regarding it.

"I'm going to kill you bastaaaaaards!"

Hugson stuck out towards Ellen with the axe he was carrying on his back.

-Crash!

"Right."

Ellen closed the distance between her and Hugson, avoiding his attack.

There was no way that Ellen would get hit by such a heavy and slow weapon.

"I knew you wouldn't be able to bear it."

Ellen had already realized that Hugson wasn't very patient after only meeting him once.

He was easily agitated, couldn't control his emotions, and acted impulsively.

He accused us of robbing adventurers because we had won over the person he was trying to get on his team. He didn't manage to get us in trouble, so he tried to hit us.

She deliberately provoked him because she knew that he wouldn't be able to remain calm when faced with evidence that we killed his colleagues.

His aggressive reaction towards the situation was already evidence enough.

-Bam!

“Kuuaaark!”

Ellen didn’t even unsheathe her sword and only punched that giant’s solar plexus.

-Baam!

“Le-leeet gooo… Urg…”

Ellen then grabbed Hugson’s hair, making him bend his back and struggle.

-Puuuuuull!

Ellen grabbed his hair in such an awkward way that she was able to pull it out just by holding it like that.

“It’s not because of your strength that you can act superior to others but your cruel nature.”

“K-kuuaaark!”

-Bam!

Ellen smashed Hugson’s head onto the floor.

Like most adventurers who were easily tempted to commit robbery, he only came that far because of his cruelty, which he mistook for actual skills. That was the kind of guy Hugson was.

In the end, he couldn’t even touch a single of Ellen’s hairs.

“Don’t mistake something like that for skill.”

Ellen looked down at Hugson with contempt in her eyes.

* * *

The three of us had to rest our completely exhausted bodies first. I noticed that Ellen was still reluctant to rest because she thought we weren't over the hill yet, but she was already close to her limits, both mentally and physically.

She eventually fell asleep at the inn; it almost seemed like she had fainted. It was only natural that we got a triple room, just in case of any unforeseen situations.

No matter what happened, I thought things would somehow turn out well as long as Eleris was with us, so I just evacuated to the sidelines and decided to watch the situation.

Hugson was detained in the temporary detention cells attached to the Guild Office.

Naturally, he denied all the charges against him. The guild officers were busy moving about, sending reports to their headquarters in the Exian Outpost, as they didn't know that Hugson was planning something of that extent.

If they didn't deal with Hugson properly, it might be their heads that got cut off.

We woke up around noon.

After reorganizing ourselves over meals and drinks, the guild officer came to us.

He said that we should be part of the investigation as important witnesses.

We told the investigator, who appeared to be a high-ranking officer who came there from the headquarters as fast as he could, everything we had seen, heard, and done.

He seemed to have nothing to do with St. Point's affairs.

"…It's rather difficult to call this self-defense when you actively murdered them. Of course, given the circumstances, you might think that you've made the best decision. However, it was dozens of them, not just one. You can't be exonerated for killing all of them, so you'll need to be arrested…"

Before he started to go off on some long rant, I took out the Imperial Crest and my Temple student ID.

"…"

He looked down at both of those items in silence and sighed.

"As Temple students, you have a clear-set identity and are protected by the court, so we don't have to be afraid that you'll run away. There's no need for restraints, huh."

He added that he wouldn't place any restraints on us.

Murder was common, but in the end, it wasn't fine to just kill people.

Those who killed someone and hid it could get away with it; however, those who killed people that absolutely should be killed would be judged, not rewarded, if they revealed their deeds.

Hiding our actions was the correct answer, but Ellen chose to report everything to the guild to catch Hugson.

As a result, Hugson would get investigated, but we would also be held accountable for our actions.

How absurd.

However, I wasn't particularly dissatisfied with how the situation panned out.

"Anyway, I'll just conclude that your actions were completely justified in that situation. That'll do."

It was an absurd situation, but we were even more absurd.

Murder, whether one deemed it good or evil, was ultimately wrong.

However, we were part of a privileged class that could get away with something like that, to a degree.

If one covered absurdity with even greater absurdity, no harm would be done to oneself.

That was all that mattered.

CHAPTER 161

Ellen, Eleris, and I stayed at St. Point for a few more days after we returned. We wanted to stay to observe how things would pan out and also had to be interrogated.

Hugson was under investigation at St. Point. If the allegations turned out to be true, it would be quite difficult for him to come out of the case alive. After all, he was just some condescending guy located in St. Point.

The chances of us getting tried for those murders were rather slim. Therefore, we would be judged according to how many benefits we brought to the guild, completely excluding the punishment we deserved.

We didn't complete a request.

Therefore, there wasn't any reward set for it, and we didn't know how reasonable our actions in that situation were.

Additionally, it was treated as a criminal case. We couldn't know what our merits or rewards would be until the investigation was complete and the truth was revealed.

St. Point and the Points a bit further south were places low-ranking adventurers frequented.

Confronted with the conclusive evidence of a massacre having taken place as well as having secured suspects there, the Exian Outpost sent a considerable amount of manpower.

Warriors, not adventurers, were deployed to places where usually only bottom-of-the-barrel kinds of people flooded the streets.

"It seems that the escort team request will be completely taken down and carried out by those professional troops."

It was a reaction to the Bandit Adventurers, plus the destroyed Klitz Point.

They had even planned to induce the guild to send more supplies so they could rob them. Hence the guild had to deploy more specialized personnel. For the guild, it must have been shocking enough that the leader they picked for a request had actually dreamed of eating their supplies.

We did all the research we were supposed to do during our stay of a few days, so we were ready to move again.

-Is it them?

-That's right.

-Only the three of them killed all of them?

-No way…

-Is this wizard really that amazing? Is that what it is?

-Anyway, thanks to them, we were able to keep our lives.

We were becoming celebrities in St. Point. Even though we caused the request to get canceled, they would have fallen for Hugson's trap and died otherwise.

We killed a lot of people, but as a result, we saved even more lives.

Dead men tell no tales.

It felt like the praise of the living was tickling the back of my head.

Ellen, Eleris, and I woke up late, so we were having lunch.

We were somewhat busy with being investigated and resting our exhausted bodies.

The case had been solved by Ellen from start to finish. It was Ellen who noticed something suspicious first, guessed what was behind it, and found out everything.

I felt like my thoughts had become sluggish ever since the clash with that large bandit gang. Acting normal after killing so many people just wasn't possible, so my mind just didn't work as fast as usual.

I couldn't afford to think about anything else as my mental capacity had already reached its limit.

Honestly, it was quite weird that I'd been holding up as well as I did, but Ellen was even weirder.

"I said I needed more experience, but we ended up having the wrong type of experience… Damn it."

We knew that we had to be careful of other people, but neither Ellen nor I wanted to have that type of experience.

"…I kind of expected it, but I didn't know it would turn out like this."

However, she seemed to have known what we were about to witness. Ellen was certainly on guard. It looked like she was the one who kept being wary of other people above anything else in mind.

What kinds of stories did Artorius tell his sister Ellen? I had no idea.

Like that, the biggest event spread around St. Point, the collapse of Als Point, had been resolved.

Because the largest requests had been resolved, it was safe to say that there was nothing more to do there. If one wanted to do requests, one would have to go further south. However, the newly formed supply convoy team would most likely resolve all the problems.

"Should we go back to Exian again or…"

"E-erm…"

As we tried to sort out our next move, a voice interrupted us.

Ellen, Eleris, and I looked in the voice's direction.

"…"

Austin was standing there with misery, shame, embarrassment, and countless other emotions etched into his face.

He struggled to open his mouth while enduring all that shame.

"I’m sorry, I came here to thank you… If it weren’t for you, our convoy team… everyone, including me, would have died.”

Without our interference, the convoy would have taken off as is, and all of them would have been helplessly slaughtered. He came to us to thank us for that but also to apologize.

Even if he did it because he was intimidated, he still tried to frame us. It seemed like he was still feeling guilty about that.

He didn’t have to come to us like that. We didn’t do this for Austin's appreciation. However, Austin still came to apologize to us when he didn’t need to.

That was enough.

“Yeah, well. Don’t worry about…”

“Quit.”

Just as I was about to say something, Ellen looked straight at Austin and spoke to him.

“H-huh…?”

“Just quit all this.”

Ellen was speaking in a very imperative tone, so unlike her. Austin’s complexion went pale at her sudden words. Ellen stared at Austin and spoke in a cold tone.

“You don’t even have the skills to take care of yourself.”

“You don’t have the insight to recognize dangerous people.”

“You don’t have the discretion to consider what risks this job entails.”

“You should at least be shameless, but you aren’t.”

That was the first time that I heard Ellen use such abusive language. I was just as perplexed as Austin.

No skill, no insight, no discretion…

However, he felt shame.

"Hugson may be a failure as a human being, but he was successful as an adventurer. He was bold, cruel, and shameless."

Ellen seemed to have decided that he had to stop being an adventurer as soon as Austin came to apologize to us.

He should have just been shameless and not apologized, but he couldn't do that.

If one lacked as much as he did, one should also lack conscience to get through the job at least, but Austin actually tried to maintain his conscience.

That was why Hugson excelled as an adventurer. He was a murderer, but adventurers were just a bunch of guys looking to make it big quick.

Those types of subhumans could survive better than anyone else as adventurers.

If one didn't have the skills to do anything in any way, one shouldn't become an adventurer.

I didn't know much about Hugson's skills, but he had his mindset going for him.

If one didn't have the skill, one had to at least be clever.

If one was neither skilled nor clever, one had to at least be cautious.

If one wasn't any of that, one had to throw away one's conscience and shame.

If one was too kind, one had to have the ability to overcome the weakness caused by one's own kindness.

That guy didn't belong anywhere.

That was what Ellen had pointed out.

"I don't know if you are a failure as a human or not, but as an adventurer, you are definitely bound to be a failure, so quit."

Ellen seemed to hate anyone who wanted to become an adventurer because they admired Artorius. They were just people in pursuit of the romance of adventure without actually knowing what an adventurer was.

They were just helpless scapegoats. They didn't even know that they had to risk their lives just for their clumsy, unrealistic dreams.

They didn't even consider that they might get robbed by bandits and stabbed in the back or hit over the head by their allies instead of simply dying while fighting against monsters.

Ellen's honest criticism left Austin in a state of indignation.

"Ah… Y-yes… That's… That's right…"

He shook his head with a miserable expression spread across his face. The fact that he couldn't even refute Ellen's cold remark was rather pitiful.

Austin, who had boasted that he was part of a B-ranked adventurer's party, didn't even know what he could call his own.

Was it really good to just break apart all the hopes and dreams of someone who had nothing but that and just send them home?

Ellen chose to break everything apart now that cracks had formed.

She told him to live a normal life. He wouldn't have listened to her if she had spoken to him gently, so she had to use harsh words.

I watched Austin leave the inn with his whole body slumped. He might give up and actually go home, but he also might just go and take on a new request even after

hearing those words.

Ellen probably thought it would be better to be alive and well than to chase after one's hopes and dreams.

"…"

However, Ellen opened her eyes wide as if she couldn't believe what she had just said.

She didn't think she would actually say something like that to someone.

"Let's talk for a sec."

"…Yes."

I helped Ellen up and led her into the room.

Eleris looked at us as we went up to the room with a complicated expression on her face.

* * *

After we returned to the room, I faced Ellen. She had no idea what to say to me. She had no reason to say anything either.

Ellen stared at the floor with her head down.

"Should we go back?"

However, that was all I asked Ellen, who was only staring at the floor blankly.

"…"

That was one hell of a harsh experience we had.

Not only was it one person, but we had ended up killing dozens of people. I told myself that I should think about it later, but I didn't actually have the time nor the power to seriously process all of it because of various factors. Ellen kept standing upright, trying to figure everything out.

Not even I would have been able to do it, and yet Ellen managed it.

"You don’t have to force yourself."

So it was only natural that Ellen was more mentally strained than I was. She acted that way because she thought that her actions didn’t only affect her own life but mine as well.

She probably was already anxious and stressed enough because of that, and then everything else had happened.

It was strange that she didn't end up collapsing in that extreme state of exhaustion. Her emotions finally exploded when she saw Austin.

He looked so pathetic that she couldn’t bear not saying anything to him, and even Ellen herself was surprised by her own words.

…By her loss of control.

That was why I asked her something like that.

If she wanted to go back, we could.

She didn’t have to force herself to keep going.

“No…”

Ellen put her head against my chest.

“I’m just… tired…”

She didn’t start crying suddenly or something.

However, as she said those words, she rested her head on my chest and didn’t say anything for a while. I simply stood still, holding her head with one hand.

But that was when Ellen began to tremble slightly as if her emotions were getting stronger and stronger.

After she showed me some of her weak sides, it was as if her walls were collapsing,

letting her weakness burst through the cracks.

“I… I’m scared…”

Ellen was trembling.

“I feel like I’m starting to resemble my brother… It’s scary…”

“What… do you mean?”

"I vowed to… not care whatever happens to other people…”

There seemed to be something else that added even more to Ellen’s stress.

“And yet, I’m… doing the same thing as my brother…”

Countless people would have died if we didn’t get rid of the bandits who occupied Klitz Point.

So Ellen had decided to annihilate all of them. She didn’t hesitate to get her hands dirty with blood.

She would think about her actions later. She had to think about her next steps first and put her decision into action.

However, as she gradually processed what happened, Ellen became aware of something.

She vowed to live her life without sacrificing everything for the sake of others like her brother did, but when such a situation came up, she ended up taking risky actions without even considering her own well-being.

She had killed someone to save the lives of others.

Ragann Artorius must have acted similarly to that as well.

At first, he must have had just a normal sense of justice. If it was something within his power, he would do it—something like that.

After all, saving someone’s life could never be a bad thing, right?

However, as he repeated such actions, a sense of duty would have cropped up inside of him.

First, it was just a few, then it was a dozen, then hundreds, until it was beyond thousands.

Eventually, he came to be revered as a hero to whom it was a matter of course to save someone's life.

And in the end, he reached a point where he saw it as a matter of course to sacrifice even his own life for the sake of others.

So, like that, he managed to kill the Demon King in exchange for his own life.

Ellen was terrified when she realized that she had started to have the same thoughts as her brother. She never wanted to be like that, but she had almost immediately taken her first step in that direction.

She didn't regret it.

It wasn't regrettable to save someone's life, after all.

She realized that she was taking the same actions as Ragan Arotirus in the end and started to feel afraid.

It almost felt like it was something ingrained in her, as if it was running in their blood.

"Don't overthink it."

"…"

I mumbled and pulled her head a little closer to my chest.

Right.

I knew what she was worried about.

“Anyone would’ve made that choice in that situation.”

However, in the end, it was nothing much.

“Everyone would have done this if their abilities allowed it.”

There were people who could and couldn’t do something like that.

There were plenty of people out there who would have made the same choice as us.

"We could do it, so that’s why we did it.”

“…”

"There was no other reason.”

We had made a common decision.

The process and the ending were anything but normal, but our decisions were more than normal.

She didn’t make that choice just because she was the younger sister of Artorius.

That was what she had to believe.

She wasn’t ordinary, but she had to believe that she was ordinary.

I couldn’t leave any room for her worries and anguish to breed.

“Is that so…”

“Yeah, that’s how it is.”

“…”

Ellen’s trembling slowly subsided.

CHAPTER 162

Perhaps because of her extreme mental, not physical, exhaustion, Ellen went to bed early, even though the sun hadn't set yet.

She might not have been able to sleep properly up until then because of her anxiety and tension. It was a bit much for her to call that place safe, after all.

Seeing that girl sleeping with a furrowed forehead, I felt somewhat sorry for her. It was more than obvious that she still felt that anxiety even though she was sleeping.

I was thinking of leaving her.

I might feel reassured with her around, but as long as I was together with her, her burden would increase as well.

As it was a three-person room, Eleris also entered the room.

"Shall we take a walk?"

I glanced at Ellen at Eleris's whispered words. There might be relatively less dangerous factors there in St. Point, but I still thought it was a little too much to just leave a sleeping kid all on her own.

'It's okay. I'll set up an alarm spell.'

Eleris only mouthed those words. She seemed to try to reassure me.

It looked like she had something to say to me.

* * *

Eleris and I left the inn and took a walk around St Point, looking at the guys busily preparing for the new convoy.

St. Point wasn't very large, but one could still take a walk around the place.

“You have made a good friend.”

“…Yeah.”

It was the first time ever since I came there that I had such a casual conversation with Eleris, except for that short moment at Klitz Point.

“But it also worries me.”

“Worry?”

Eleris looked towards the inn where we were staying, and her eyes turned slightly sad.

“She is so strong that she’s about to break.”

Her words seemed to signify that she was worried about Ellen, not about me.

She was too strong, so she was about to break.

I think I knew what she meant.

Ellen had continued to march on strongly all the way to St. Point. She was sharp and doubted everything. As a result, we were safe, but Ellen suffered from extreme mental exhaustion.

She was so sensitive to everything that we were able to avoid every danger on our way and uncover the truth behind that incident.

However, if she kept going like that, she might end up collapsing soon.

Eleris seemed worried about that.

“Everyone needs someone to show their weak side to.”

No one could be simply strong. Everyone had a weak side.

One needed someone one could show their weak side to

“It seems like you’re someone like that to this girl.”

Someone whom she could show her weak side…

Eleris said that I seemed to be that kind of person to Ellen.

Yes, Ellen had often shown me her weakness for some time, a weak side she would never show anyone else.

“I think that's a good thing.”

“…That’s good then.”

“Please treat her well.”

Eleris looked at me.

“I’m already doing that.”

“Is that so?”

Then Eleris smiled as if she was happy.

“…What happened to you was terrible. It was obviously painfully sad and ugly. Your Highness has been through something I didn’t want you to go through…”

Eleris spoke as she looked at the sunset, her eyes filled with a complicated mix of emotions.

“I think I can rest a little now.”

I had killed someone.

However, it was to protect others.

It wasn’t anything good, but Eleris, while sad, seemed to be a little relieved.

“But… Are you still okay?”

Eleris seemed to wonder if my mind was in agony.

She wondered about the guilt and sorrow from the murders I had committed.

How was I?

Ellen told me to think about those things later. I first had to do what I had to do.

The result of organizing my thoughts was only one:

“I should be fine.”

I decided not to think about it for the moment.

* * *

We decided to go back to the Exian Outpost and plan our new schedule the next day, but I actually thought it would be fine to take a few days to rest. Ellen needed to spend some time in a safe place where she didn’t have to work her brain all the time.

It’s something I'd been through, and if Ellen stayed in that state any longer, she might suffer from stress-induced hair loss.

That would be a grave problem.

Just how miserable it was to not have a single hair on your head! However, I was completely fine because that wouldn’t happen anymore! After all, I had a ring that made me immune to hair loss!

I had to protect Ellen’s hair.

That night…

After eating, I planned to go straight to bed. Ellen was sleeping like a log, so she skipped dinner.

What if she woke up in the middle of the night because she was hungry? Eleris was also getting ready to sleep. I didn’t know if she would actually sleep or not, though.

I thought she was only pretending to go to sleep and would actually watch us all night while we were sleeping.

And…

-Knock, knock

We suddenly heard a knock on the door of our room.

I was sure that the Guild's business was almost over.

Ellen got woken up just by that sound; however, she was already quite awake. Was she really sleeping back then?

I slowly approached the door with my sword in my hand, just in case.

"Who is it?"

-The Adventurer Guild's investigator.

"…What?"

I heard a voice outside. He was an investigator sent from Exian's Adventurers' Guild.

I thought I was done for the day, but it seemed like I still had some business to take care of.

When I opened the door, there was that investigator looking at me with a cold expression on his face.

"Could I talk with you for a minute? Don't worry. It's about the investigation, not about your charges."

It seemed that he tried to assure me with that addition to his words.

* * *

Perhaps it was something confidential, as he walked into our room and sat down at the table.

Ellen, Eleris, and I were all wondering what the investigator came there for.

"You guys assumed that the guys that attacked Klitz Point were also responsible for

the attack on Als Point after they came up North, right?"

"Yeah."

"I guess."

Both Ellen and I nodded to his words. The bandits who attacked Als Point had traveled north and raided Klitz Point as well. We also told the officer in charge of the case that we suspected that they were trying to plunder the goods transported in the convoy.

"We have secured testimonies regarding the alleged raid of Klitz Point from Hugson. It has been said that they sent out an advance party that was supposed to occupy Klitz Point and raid the convoy"

"…So what?"

I didn't know whether Hugson simply admitted to all the charges or if they used some kind of trick to get a confession out of him. However, it seemed that the investigator somehow managed to make that Hugson confess.

Ellen and I nodded. What did he want to say with that?

"That so-called 'advance party' started from this Point traveling to Klitz Point; they didn't start from Als Point. Hugson said he didn't know anything about Als Point, which lost contact with every other Point."

He admitted guilt to the attack on Klitz Point but claimed that he had nothing to do with Als Point's case.

He claimed that these two cases weren't connected at all.

"We have confirmed the travel path of the bandits that we had obtained from Hugson by looking at the Guild's data. They all went down to Klitz Point via St. Point and never came back. I also confirmed that it was impossible for them to attack Als point due to time constraints."

Hugson didn't commit perjury. Investigators had already confirmed, based on the data collected from the Adventurers' Guild, that they absolutely had nothing to do with the attack on Als Point.

Our reasoning was wrong. The reason for the loss of contact to Als Point and the other Points connected to it was still unclear.

But why was he telling us that? We weren't investigators, so we had no reason to take responsibility for our wrong guess.

However, Ellen seemed to know why.

"…You want us to find out what happened, right?"

"…You're sharp."

The investigator clicked his tongue slightly.

"Currently, we are very short of manpower because we have to organize a new convoy. The Exian Outpost and the Guild can't provide any financial support. There are no other skilled adventurers here in St. Point either."

Hugson, who was the Point's highest-ranking adventurer, had tried to pull something ridiculous like that.

However, although we three were only F-ranked newbies, we were bold and skilled enough to destroy the bandits who occupied Klitz Point.

From the investigator's point of view, if they quickly found out the reason for Als Point's collapse and it turned out its threat was very serious, they would need to attach more escorts to the convoy.

"We expect it to be a very dangerous mission, as no one has yet to return from Als Point. So the choice is yours. I'm just here to present you with this offer."

It was impossible to force adventurers to take on a request. If he was an investigator of the Adventurers Guild, then he probably was in a fairly high position.

"Your task would be to scout out Als Point. If you come across a threat, keep in mind that this mission only entails reconnaissance, not extermination or subjugation."

He was willing to entrust us with that mission in that situation where manpower

was very scarce.

“The estimated level of risk for this mission is B-rank, so it’s a very dangerous request. The reward would be ten gold coins each. If the information you provide is decisive, you will receive ten more gold coins.”

He promised us a pretty huge reward. Just for going down to Als Point to see what happened, we would be able to receive thirty gold coins. If the information was decisive, we could get thirty more.

It wasn’t an extermination quest but a reconnaissance mission, and yet we would still receive 10 million won per person for it. The pay was insanely high, in my opinion.

However, it was definitely dangerous. We didn’t know what happened in Als Point, after all.

“We… we’ll do it!”

“…?”

“?”

Before Ellen or I could even say a single word, Eleris suddenly shouted.

What?

Instead of waiting for our opinion on it, why did Eleris suddenly rush into it?

“Ah, that’s… N-no. It would be nice if we could… That's what I meant. Yes.”

Ah. That was when I remembered.

Eleris’ Scroll Store had very little revenue.

Her living conditions were the worst as well.

She lost her mind the moment money came into play.

…Eleris thought she could make a lot of money, so her body moved before she could think straight.

Ellen seemed to pounder for a moment after Eleris's sudden outburst and then nodded her head.

"It's not a subjugation quest but a reconnaissance quest. I think it's something we're capable of doing."

Ellen looked at me after she finished her sentence as if she was asking for my opinion on the matter.

"Then let's try our hand at it."

Money.

I quite liked it as well.

* * *

As St. Point didn't have any manpower, they commissioned adventurers on Hugson's level to do certain requests.

There were no skilled people in St. Point, so they had no other choice but to entrust that important task to us, the rookies that appeared out of nowhere. If one went down South, one might encounter some really skilled people, but they were in a situation where they couldn't hire those people.

It would take time to recruit powerful people from other regions.

The investigator explained to us that we should go to Exian Outpost's or St. Point's Adventurers Guild. He also wrote up a formal request with his signature on it and gave it to us.

"It's just a reconnaissance mission, but its pay is so high."

After the investigator left, Eleris spoke up.

“If we fail or die, they wouldn’t have to pay us. As it’s a request made by the Adventurers Guild, we won’t receive any advance payment either, as it’s basically guaranteed that they will pay us. That’s why the commission fee is quite high. “

That was Ellen’s answer.

It was a job we would only get paid for if we succeeded. One wouldn’t get paid so much if one took the request of one of the Adventurers Guild’s clients.

However, there was no need to pay the dead after all.

If we failed or died, the Adventurers Guild wouldn’t pay out a single penny. There were a lot of cruel and ruthless adventurers, but the world of requests was rather strict and tough in the end.

So they promised a lot of money and sent adventurers out on dangerous missions. And only those who manage to return alive were actually paid.

The Adventurers Guild was rather cruel as well, after all. Adventurers jumping into danger like moths into the flames were pretty stupid, but those moths wouldn’t fly into the fire if the Adventurers Guild wasn’t shaking huge amounts of money in front of them.

Eleris looked quite glum after listening to Ellen’s explanation.

That was a place where one’s dignity as a living being became worthless in front of money.

“We’ll leave early in the morning tomorrow. We should sleep early.”

We had plenty of time to rest up during the investigation of Hugson’s case.

We decided to move south again the next day as soon as possible.

* * *

It took about four days for us to reach Als Point. Before we set off, we completed reorganizing and stocking up on preserved food, and at the investigator’s request, we stopped by the Adventurers Guild of St. Point.

“We can provide you with horses if necessary.”

The outcome of our mission determined the fate of the convoy. As many people had to move along with it, the damages caused by binding those people down as well as to the isolated front lines would exacerbate with every passing day.

That was why we had been promised quite the sum as our reward.

So the investigator told us that he could provide us with horses unrelated to the reward we would receive.

Of course, Ellen told me that she couldn’t ride a horse.

She hadn’t learned how to yet.

“I know how to ride a horse.”

Eleris said that she could afford to brush up her horse-riding skills along the way. She didn’t seem to think that it would be a bad idea to take the horses, as the matter was very urgent.

Of course, my horse riding skills weren’t that great, but as long as I didn’t have to participate in a race or something, I thought it would be possible to simply move.

“Then I could ride together with you…”

However, Ellen seemed to think of something else, regardless of whether we could ride horses or not.

“It’s going to be a rough journey. Let’s not take them.”

She seemed to have decided that it would be inefficient to travel by horse, as we didn’t know when or where an emergency might occur.

I didn’t think it would have made any difference if we rode those horses anyway. The terrain was rather curved, so even if we went by horse, we wouldn’t be much faster.

Eleris and I agreed with Ellen’s decision.

“I hope that the three of you will return safely.”

We all nodded at the investigator's words.

* * *

We made our way back to Klitz Point, from where we had left not too long previously. Since Eleris casted Chilling Touch on us again, we had almost no trouble with the heat.

"…But come to think of it, it only takes a day to get to Klitz Point, so we'll reach it by tonight, right?"

"Right."

Ellen nodded at my words.

"Uhmm… We'll have to rest in a place filled to the brim with corpses then."

Eleris looked exhausted.

"You could camp outside."

"What choice is sleeping in the wilderness and sleeping in a place where tons of people have died…?"

I hated both choices!

Anyway, even if we didn't rest at Klitz Point, we would have to camp at some point. The road to Als Point was destroyed and broken.

"By the way, what do you think actually happened to the people in the other Als Points?"

At Eleris's words, neither Ellen nor I could give any sharp answers. After some time, it was more than clear that Hugson's gang of bandits wasn't related to the destruction of Als Point. Those punks knew that a large convoy with supplies and commodities would be put together following Als Point's collapse, so they immediately headed to Klitz Point from St. Point. They didn't even get to Als Point in the first place.

"I'm not completely sure, but there are two possibilities.

Ellen took the lead and presented the possibilities.

"One, those who returned from Als Point were actually killed by the bandits in Klitz Point."

There must have been some adventurers who noticed that they ended up isolated from the other Points and tried to return. On their return, they were killed by the bandits who occupied Klitz Point. That was why we didn't get any news from any of the Als Points.

That was one possibility.

"Two, there were bandits or similar people occupying Als Point as well, and those who were trying to go back died in Als Point."

The second possibility was that they couldn't even go back to Klitz Point.

We didn't even know if the incident at Als Point was already over or still ongoing.

"Anyway, our goal is to scout. Let's not overdo it."

If it was something we couldn't seem to deal with, we could just watch and report back to the guild.

Ellen's words seemed to serve as a reminder of the nature of our mission. We didn't know what might happen if we tried to annihilate the bandits like we did in Klitz Point and something beyond our expectations happened.

In other words. we should really think of fighting against the threat as a last resort for once.

CHAPTER 163

Apart from our journey down to Als Point, we had to make a certain choice that day.

We could see Klitz Point from a distance as we slowly approached it.

"…What should we do?"

Neither Ellen nor Eleris could give me an answer to my question.

Last time we were there, it was raining and midnight, but that time the weather was quite nice, and we were able to reach the vicinity of Klitz Point just as the sun started to set.

Klitz Point, which was enveloped in a gloomy atmosphere unique to ghost towns, looked even worse than when I had seen it last.

We had to choose between sleeping in that dark and eerie place or just sleeping outside.

Sleeping outside was pretty dangerous.

We could rest relatively safely, protected by Klitz Point's fence and houses. Of course, we had to put up with that creepy atmosphere and the smell of blood.

As safety was our top priority, I thought it would be better to stay at Klitz Point, even if it was somewhat uncomfortable.

"…Let's go in for now. If we can endure the smell of blood, we'll be able to rest there pretty safely."

Ellen seemed to have judged as such after taking a look at it. I decided to rest inside the Point as well if the smell of the scattered corpses was somewhat tolerable.

Just thinking about it made me feel terrible again.

Just looking at the bodies before felt like a bitch, but as a few days had passed

already, the corpses must have decomposed somewhat, and maggots must have started feasting on them. I didn't have the confidence to take in that sight and stay sane.

There would even be the corpses of the ones we killed among them.

Eleris also looked very terrible as she was probably thinking about something similar to what I was.

…But weren't vampires undead?

So wouldn't that make Eleris a corpse as well?

…What was with that?

I only thought about it, but I felt like I was actually bad-mouthing Eleris.

I was thinking about something extremely rude.

After apologizing to Eleris in my heart, we entered Klitz Point.

Ellen suggested that we should sleep outside if the smell of the rotting corpses was too strong.

"…"

"…"

"…What?"

We couldn't detect any scent of the rotten corpses Ellen was worried about, even after we entered Klitz Point.

However, that wasn't the only reason why we were surprised.

"Where… did all the corpses go?"

The corpses that were supposed to be scattered all over Klitz Point were all gone.

* * *

The corpses of the people that originally resided in Klitz Point were all thrown into a hole by the bandits, so they were kind of buried in the ground.

We had dug a trap at the entrance of the inn and buried the bandits who fell into the pit alive.

However, those who tried to escape through the windows were stabbed or shot to death one after the other. We had no time to dispose of their corpses.

So the corpses of those bandits should have still been strewn about. However, all the corpses just seemed to have disappeared.

Ellen and I had eliminated the guards at the entrance of the Point and thrown them into the bushes; their corpses that were supposed to be still there were also missing.

Not only that…

"…I don't think anyone buried them either."

The pit in front of the inn, and the hole the bandits put the corpses in, seemed to have both been dug up.

Did what happened at Als Point really come up to Klitz Point?

Or was that a completely different case?

Anyway, something unusual seemed to have happened at Klitz Point again.

"Did something like a beast… Eat all of the corpses?"

Eleris carefully gave her opinion. A beast wouldn't be able to eat so many corpses, and there would have been bones or scraps left over if that were the case.

"Does a beast exist that can devour all of the corpses aboveground, dig up pits, and also devour all of the buried corpses as well?"

At Eleris's words, Ellen asked her that with a completely serious expression.

“Hmm… I wouldn’t say there isn’t one.”

I could see the possible suspects running through Eleris’s mind. Eleris seemed to know some monsters that were that gluttonous.

All the corpses had disappeared, and the situation was more than suspicious.

The area was obviously dangerous. Ellen was thinking deeply.

“I don’t know if sleeping outside or staying here would be more dangerous.”

It would be dangerous if we continued to act at night. Sleeping outside would leave us vulnerable to raids in a wide-open place.

However, it would also be dangerous to stay at Klitz Point, as we didn’t know what happened there.

We had to pick one risky situation between the two.

We were being forced to make a very uncomfortable choice.

“There’s also the method of staying up all night like last time, but…”

That method would consume too much of our stamina. In that situation where we couldn’t be sure if the southern route was completely safe, it would be a very bad idea to unnecessarily lose our stamina. That option couldn’t even be considered.

“Let’s rest here for now and check the situation. It would be impossible for us to hide if we slept outside. I think that would be a lot more dangerous.”

There were multiple buildings there in Klitz Point. If we hid inside one of them, no one would be able to clearly see us.

As the leader of the party, Ellen had made her decision.

* * *

We didn’t feel any other discomfort other than the gloomy and eerie atmosphere emanating through the whole Point. As the corpses had suddenly disappeared, that meant there wasn’t any rotting smell either.

We settled in at another inn, not the one we burned down.

We decided to sleep in the dining room on the first floor rather than in a room from which we couldn't escape quickly in case of something unexpected happening.

We picked the dining room as it was a wide enough area for us to act freely in case of an emergency, and we could clearly monitor the situation of most of the Point through the windows.

By lighting all the torches we could find in the Point, we could secure enough light sources to identify any possible threats in advance. However, another option would be to not use any light at all.

"Let's not light up the area. We might get targeted."

"Yes."

Ellen chose the latter. People had been massacred inside that inn as well, so the smell of blood rose up from the carpets and leather furniture.

However, it wasn't unbearable. Enough time had passed, and the smell was pretty much gone.

There was a kitchen in the inn, so we could even cook inside, but we were in no position to worry about something like that in the tense situation we found ourselves in.

However, we still ate dinner, which consisted of preserved foods, including bread and ham, inside the inn. Some of the ingredients had already started to decay, so we didn't touch them.

"We don't know what might happen, so we should eat as much as we can."

"…Understood."

Ellen seemed like she needed to refill her stamina, so she was devouring all the preserved foods we could find inside the inn because it wasn't part of our provision.

I didn't want to speak up about it in that situation, but didn't she just want to eat a lot?

“Let’s get some rest and leave early in the morning."

"That’s a good idea."

Eleris nodded, agreeing with Ellen.

We decided to sleep on one of the inn’s wide tables.

However, we would just take short rests. As we didn’t know what might await us, we decided to hold guard.

The first guard was Ellen, the second was me, and the third was Eleris. We would take turns sleeping for about two hours. Ellen decided that she would spend the most time as a guard among us.

“I can do it twice. You don’t have to push yourself.”

Eleris said that she would spend four hours as a guard in her stead. It seemed like she was worried. However, Ellen simply shook her head at that.

“No, Miss Relya, you need to preserve your strength the most among us.”

She seemed to be considerate towards her as she was a wizard. Of course, Eleris thanked her for that consideration, but she was still restless.

I’m fine! Really! Actually, I like the night a lot more because it’s cool!

It seemed like she was holding in what she actually wanted to say.

We would go to bed early and wake up at dawn when it was still dark. We all wanted to shorten our stay in Klitz Point as much as possible.

* * *

How long had it been since I fell asleep on the table?

-Tok, tok

"…Huh."

If one's nerves were constantly on edge even after falling asleep, one could wake up so quickly as if one had never slept in the first place. Moonlight was seeping in from the window on the dark inn's first floor.

Looking at Ellen's expression, it seemed like nothing of note had happened.

"Good work. Sleep well."

"Yes."

Ellen nodded and climbed onto the table, immediately laying down. She wouldn't be able to sleep right away, but it would be better for her if she got some rest at least.

Ellen should be even jumpier than me when I tried to sleep. She might jump up if she heard the slightest rattling noise, so I sat down on a chair and moved to look through the windows around me with my arms crossed. I didn't want to wander around and drive Ellen crazy.

Even though it was midsummer, the vicinity was so silent it almost felt chilling.

"…"

I had just realized how strong my nerves actually were, sleeping peacefully in a place where so many people had died.

If I came back safely from that place, I didn't know if my skills would have improved, but I was 100% sure that my mentality would have grown a lot stronger.

I could see why Ellen wanted to gain some practical experience.

There was a limit to what one could achieve with training and practice alone. One could only improve further with practical experience.

I never wanted to experience killing someone.

However, both Ellen and I gained something out of it while also losing a certain

something.

I didn't think we could call it growth, but we had definitely changed, and we would never be able to go back to how we were.

"…"

Eleris was lying on her side on the table, looking at me. She probably never even fell asleep in the first place.

Just as Ellen and I were extremely nervous, Eleris must have been even more nervous. She might have been on edge, constantly preparing for any accident that might occur. Had Eleris ever slept decently since we started that journey?

Just as Ellen was mentally exhausted, Eleris probably felt the same. She didn't show any signs of feeling burdened, though.

She just looked at me quietly in the dark and smiled.

No matter what happens, I'll protect myself and Ellen.

So don't worry.

That was what her smile seemed to convey.

My nerves, which had been pulled taut up until then, loosened a bit as I relaxed slightly.

Her smile blew away my stress and fatigue.

Yes.

I was safe.

'Go sleep.'

'It's alright. Your Highness should sleep. I'll keep watch.'

Eleris responded to me only by mouthing what she wanted to say when I told her that it would be fine for her to sleep.

How did Eleris become so stubborn? I didn't fall asleep when Eleris told me it would be fine if I did.

I just whiled away the time as I kept an eye on my surroundings. Eleris would most likely not wake up Ellen at all, even after her guard time was over. She would let her sleep.

How long had it been?

'Your Highness.'

Eleris's expression as she looked at me suddenly hardened.

'You have to get ready.'

Get ready.

At these words, all my muscles hardened.

'Something's coming.'

It seemed that something had been caught in the surveillance web Eleris had spread out.

I went straight to the window to check the moonlit Klitz Point. It was dark, so I couldn't see really well.

I couldn't use the night vision spell.

However, I could use self-suggestion to strengthen my eyesight. I wasn't sure if I could give myself infrared vision, but I sure wanted to see a bit better than that.

It wasn't the same as when I was under the night vision spell, but things definitely started to become a bit clearer.

Something was gathering around Klitz Point. There were a decent amount of them as well.

“Wake up!”

“!”

Both of them rose up at my shout.

Unidentified figures had been advancing in great numbers towards Klitz Point.

I couldn’t check properly, but it seemed like a group of people were walking towards the Point.

Both Ellen and Eleris stood up and armed themselves. The shapes I saw through the window could immediately be distinguished under the moonlight.

“What… are those…?”

“…Crazy.”

Ellen was stunned for a moment at the absurd sight, and so was I.

“…Zombies.”

Seeing that scene, Eleris muttered a single word.

Hordes of zombies were heading towards Klitz Point, no. To be precise, they were running towards the inn we were in.

“Rooms! Get into one of the rooms!”

Eleris urgently exclaimed.

CHAPTER 164

The dining hall on the first floor of the inn was rather spacious. There was a good chance that the zombies would come through its windows instead of the entrance.

It would be impossible for us to defend against the swarm of zombies pushing in from all directions if we stayed in there.

So we went into a guest room on the second floor and locked the door behind us. We could always jump out of the window in case of an emergency.

-*Bang*!

“Block the door!”

After locking the door, Ellen and I moved a wardrobe, the bed, and all other heavy objects we could find in front of the door. I didn’t know how long we’d be able to hold on, but it would be able to buy us some time at least.

-*Bang! Bangbang! Bang!*

The zombies charging into Klitz Point had already reached the inn and were breaking down its doors.

"Did all the corpses… turn into zombies?”

“…I think so,” Ellen muttered in disbelief.

Along with goblins and skeletons, one of the most representative mobs in fantasy stories were zombies.

I never really introduced mobs like zombies, so that setup seemed to have been randomly generated.

The zombies didn’t seem to be the slow-moving type but were able to run at great speeds.

Those slow-moving zombies had been used so much in all types of media that the running types seemed to be the trend more recently.

Fucking hell, why did you decide to go with the trends here?!

Anyway, we were able to find out what happened to the corpses—they weren't eaten or simply disappeared; they just left on their own two feet.

I couldn't use Demon Domination like that. Nothing would change even if I were able to use it. Because zombies basically lost all reason, I was also one of their targets.

Ellen's complexion grew ghostly pale as she watched the zombies swarm into the inn from the window of the room.

"Urg…"

Ellen, whose mind hung from a single thread, covered her mouth with her head as her face turned completely white. She looked as if she had seen something she shouldn't have seen.

"…Fucking hell."

After looking at them for some time, my mind also took a hit.

Not only were those rotting corpses trying to come up there; just by looking at them, I felt like my mind was about to collapse.

Living corpses would never be a pretty sight after all.

The Undead.

They were the type of monster one would never want to encounter, not only because of the danger they posed…

They were also utterly disgusting-looking.

They were about to tear down the inn door and barge into our room. It would be impossible for it to block them out forever. We had to do something. Eleris began to explain something to us calmly.

“Zombies can only be killed by bashing in their heads. They don’t die from any other injury. Their physical abilities, especially their strength, are far more superior to when they were alive. Don’t let them grab you because they will rip your flesh apart. You can’t give them any chance to get their hands on you.”

Ellen couldn't even raise any doubts at her sudden outburst of large amounts of information. That was just how big our need for information was. We had to urgently take action.

However, the biggest problem was actually something else…

“Are their bites infectious?”

“…Infectious? Yes, the bite of those corpses are poisonous, so if they bite you, the wound will get infected…”

Seeing how Eleris was answering, she didn’t seem to understand what I was trying to say.

What she was saying was that only a bite of those rotting corpses would be fatal enough to us.

But that was already enough information. It didn’t seem that we’d become zombies as well after getting bitten by them.

-Growaaaah!

-Grrrr! Graaah!

-Gruaaaah!

-Bang! Bang! Crack! Craaaaack!

The zombies soon managed to break down the door and began to pour into the inn. We could presume that they knew where we were without even seeing us.

They were headed to our room.

Ellen clenched her teeth, a look of determination on her face.

"…Ms. Relya."

"Yes>"

"I hope you won't tell anybody about what you're about to see."

"What…?"

-Shiing

Ellen immediately summoned Lament, apparently because she judged that it wasn't the time to keep it hidden anymore. Even when she annihilated the bandits, she never took out Lament up to that point. It seemed that she thought that it would be much too difficult to overcome our situation without it.

Seeing that, Eleris opened her eyes wide. She had known about it, but it was her first time actually seeing it.

She had probably heard from Loyar that Ellen was carrying a soul-bound sword.

Loyar had said that the sword was rather unusual, but she didn't know just what exactly Ellen's sword was.

I also hadn't told either of them about Ellen's identity.

However, Eleris immediately recognized the sword Ellen summoned as Lament.

"H-Hey. This… this is… I can't believe it…"

Naturally, she inevitably found out about Ellen's true identity as well. Eleris was briefly dazed by the truth that far exceeded her expectations.

She was startled by the fact that I, the last Prince of the Demon Realm, was actually friends with the person that possessed the Divine Sword Lament.

Originally, Lament was Ragan Artorius's sword.

And for some reason, that girl had it.

Eleris should have realized by then who Ellen actually was.

“There’s no time to panic.”

-Bang! Bang! Bang!

Zombies started to slam against our room door. Eleris quickly calmed down again as she realized that she didn’t have the leisure to be surprised.

She had to make a decision, as she was the only one who knew a lot about zombies.

“Just buy some time, and if you think all the zombies have entered the inn, escape through the window.”

“And then?”

I didn’t know anything about this world’s zombies, so I had no other choice but to believe Eleris’s judgment to be correct.

“Then we’ll just do the same as last time.”

Eleris suggested that we should use the same strategy we used the last time we were there.

—Dig a pit at the entrance of the inn. If we left, the zombies would also run out of the inn, so digging a pitfall in front of the entrance would work.

“Do we have enough time for that?”

However, it wouldn’t be a surprise attack like before, so there wouldn’t be enough time to make a large pit. As such, she determined that she had to stack-cast the Digging spell, but she wouldn’t have time for that.

“I’m going to stack cast the magic from the side, so please just hold on until the pit is big enough.”

-Crack! Craaack!

The door to the room was gradually giving in.

Eleris would try to cast the digging spell from the window of the second floor room, aiming for the area in front of the inn’s entrance.

We had to hold out until the pit was big enough so that we could throw all the zombies in there and then escape.

Any zombie that would leave through the entrance would fall into that pit.

Ellen nodded her head with a determined expression on her face.

“…Yes.”

Eleris opened the window and started casting her magic.

-Craack!

"Kuueee!”

-Crunch!

Ellen slashed at the zombie’s head with her sword as it tried to squeeze its head through the cracked door. She didn’t cut its neck but split its head. Due to the zombies’ strength, the bed and wardrobe that we pushed in front of the door were gradually getting pushed back.

We were stabbing and cutting the zombies that were trying to push in through the cracks of the broken door.

-Thrust! Puush! Bang!

“Fucking bitch! Urk!”

I felt like I was about to lose my mind in a different sense from last time.

Burnt corpses, corpses without limbs, half decomposed black and blue corpses, and each of them very spirited.

There were maggots writhing in their flesh. It felt terrible stabbing those corpses while looking at them with my eyes wide open. I didn’t have to look at the bodies so thoroughly before.

I had to cut off their necks to kill them for good, but I couldn't do that in the chaotic citation. I was just poking my sword through the broken door, after all.

I was constantly stabbing at the corpses that were trying to push themselves into the room. However, they didn't die.

"Kuaaaaaaaark!

"Shut up!"

-Bang!

* * *

In order to protect my fragile mind, I screamed profanities at them. My eyes were wide open when I stabbed those things several times.

I felt like I was being tortured.

Ellen was also holding Lament, but she was somewhat struggling because she couldn't get rid of them by simply stabbing them.

Seeing all the flesh, blood, and oil from the corpses on her sword was also a terrible sight.

However, fortunately, the blood and oil disappeared like smoke from her blade.

Her sword apparently had a self-maintaining function.

I understood then why Ellen said that swords with that function were the best in combat. The sword would always return back to its peak condition on its own.

However, it wasn't the time to admire her sword.

-Creaak! Craaaack!

The zombies managed to gradually break the door and push back the barricade we created. If there was just a little gap, those guys would come pouring into the room like water. Then, no matter what we did, we would get attacked by those bastards.

We wouldn't be able to stop dozens of zombies with just two swords.

-Creeeeaaaak!

As they pushed again, they added more strength, and our barricade was shoved away almost in an instant.

"Hey! Is it ready yet?"

"Yeah, it's ready! Let's escape!"

"Reinhardt!"

I immediately went to the window and jumped out of it with Eleris by my side.

-Thud!

It wasn't that far a fall, and even though I was carrying Eleris, the impact I felt wasn't that great. That must have been thanks to strengthening my body.

Ellen then also threw her body through the window and landed quite harshly.

There was a huge pit in front of the inn's entrance for the zombies to fall into. Ellen looked at me while gasping for air.

"It's the same as last time. Let's deal with the ones who try to escape through the window or any other way that isn't through the entrance separately."

"Alright."

Our mission was exactly the same as before.

Our opponents were just zombies instead of people, that was all.

Some of those zombies might have died by our hands. There were some corpses that seemed to have been burned to death, and others had either been stabbed to death or gotten their arteries cut by Ellen and me.

We had to kill the guys we had already killed before again.

-*Groooooooooaaaar!*

The zombies that gathered on the second floor scrambled to get outside, falling over each other and getting tangled after we ran outside.

“You have to cut their heads off or bash them in. Don't worry about that, though. We have to keep our distance after all.”

However, there was an added difficulty that time.

—They wouldn’t die unless they suffered a fatal trauma to the head or their head got cut off.

They were rather difficult to deal with, but some things had gotten easier as well due to the change.

“Kuwaaaaaaark!”

Zombies ran out of the inn and fell into the pits Eleris dug one after the other.

They didn’t even have a shred of intelligence in them.

That was why they fell into the pits as if they got sucked into them, not caring whether the zombie before them fell into them or not. They didn’t have the intelligence anymore to understand the concept of a trap.

-*Bang*!

However, it seemed like some impatient bastards still tried to get to us through the windows of the second and first floors.

Usually, it would be impossible for us to deal with such a large group on our own, but in that situation, it would be possible to defeat them one by one.

“Reinhardt, please protect Ms. Ralya.”

“Got it.”

Ellen entrusted Eleris’s protection to me and jumped into the fray to kill the spirited zombies.

Ellen held Lament in one hand and seemed like a ghost killing all those zombies.

Eleris's advice to cut off their heads was correct. It was also quite the convenient way to instantly kill them.

However there was no need for that, as the sword she held was Lament.

-*Slash*!

The reason for that was because that insane weapon could be swung however one liked and it would end up dissecting a zombie horizontally at its waist or diagonally from its right collarbone to the left side of its lower back.

Ellen killed all the zombies that tried to get out through the windows.

"Kuh… Hum!"

-*Slash*!

Although my weapon was rather good as well, it's performance couldn't compare to Lament.

Therefore, my actions had to be a bit more detailed.

The zombies' attack pattern was quite straightforward, and their movements didn't seem to have any form of strategy behind them.

They would just run around and try to bite you.

It wasn't really difficult for me to predict their attacks and respond to them.

I cut off a zombie's head by angling my sword properly. With more than half of its neck cut through, the zombie just fell to the floor, groaning.

If you simply smacked the sword against their necks, it wouldn't be cut off.

Rather than hitting directly, one had slightly slant the blade as if one was about to flip meat. You couldn't just slash at it with force but more as if you were trying to sweep it down by its neck. You had to carefully calculate the angle at which the neck could ideally pull on the blade and slightly saw with it to cut the head off

When you felt the sensation of hitting bones, you had to apply even more force, as if you wanted to utterly destroy them.

Because the tip of the sword wouldn't have much power behind it, one had to use the part slightly lower than the middle of the blade.

You had to adjust it so that it could properly make contact with the neck.

I got to know something I never wanted to know.

Rather than just knowing, it was engraved into my mind as I was cutting down the zombies rushing at me.

—How to mutilate those bastards that didn't even die after they got stabbed.

I didn't want to know those things, but I was forced to learn them.

-*Pak*!

"Ke… Keeeergh…"

"Hmpf!"

-*Squish*!

I stabbed my sword into the neck of one of the zombies rushing at me again. That time I didn't just cut it off. I actually twisted my sword while it was stuck in there and destroyed its cervical vertebrae. Afterward, I kicked away the fallen zombie.

Ellen had told me to protect Eleris, but they couldn't even be called playmates for her.

-Bang!

Just by hearing that smashing sound, I knew that one of the zombies rushing towards us had gotten its head destroyed before falling backwards.

This feat wasn't accomplished through magic.

-Swish, swish, swish, swish!

I could see Eleris swinging around some rope, and when she let go, I heard a menacing banging sound.

She was using a sling.

-*Woosh!*

A zombie that was running around in the distance was hit smack on the head, leading to it getting smashed apart, meaning it died.

Eleris began to put one sling projectile after the other into it and started swinging it around, carefully looking for her next target.

She actually used a sling in that situation.

I would call it ridiculous.,,

However, Eleris playfully spinning around a sling seemed to support my collapsing mind in the horrible situation.

There was no need for her to use some strong magic for those weaklings after all.

I could feel the ease with which Eleris killed them.

-*Bang*!

Eleris smashed in every zombie's head one after the other while I was shuddering and struggling to cut off the zombies' heads.

She had a terrifying accuracy to her shots.

* * *

"Huff… Huff…".

"Haa… It's… Almost over…"

After about half an hour of fighting, the zombies were almost all sorted out.

In addition to the twenty or so bandits, everyone who had originally resided in the

Point had turned into zombies, so their number was huge.

There were the zombies that fell into the pits and more than thirty zombies that had gathered around us and finally been returned to being normal corpses.

The smell and cruel sight akin to a hellscape made me feel dizzy. Ellen, who had killed the most zombies among us, came back after sending Lament back.

That was not the end.

“Let’s burn up all of them.”

“…Yes.”

Although I didn’t think that the corpses would come back to life again, we decided to burn all of them up, even after they had already drawn their last breath, to prevent something even more bizarre from happening.

-Kwaaaaaark!

-Grrrrrr! Graww!

The frenzied snarls of the zombies rang out from the pit.

“It might start moving again. Be careful when you carry it.”

After listening to Eleris’s words, Ellen and I were very careful as we began to collect the corpses and put them in one place.

After we dealt with the zombies, their bodies were severely damaged. Touching their rotten meat felt horrible. No matter how many zombies I killed, I would never get used to that.

When I was fighting them, I had to look at them straight and kill them, but after everything was over, I couldn’t even look at their faces anymore.

Had death always been so disgusting?

It took only a few days for a human to completely lose their original form.

Humans felt utter disgust towards something that only had a crude resemblance to human beings. That was the essence of the uncanny valley.

Those zombies were terrifying examples of beings that belonged to that uncanny valley. The discomfort they produced was even bigger because they actually used to be human.

As I was carrying the bodies and their heads separately, I couldn't think about anything else.

Although the zombies had attacked me first, I felt like someone who was trying to destroy the evidence after utterly mutilating and killing someone.

We collected all the zombies except for the ones trapped in the pits and poured the flammable substances Eleris had brought over them before setting everything on fire.

-*Hroow*!

After that, we poured the flammable substances and oil into the pits before we set it on fire.

-*Kieeeeeeeeeek*!

Accompanied by terrible screams, two flames climbed up from Klitz Point.

"…"

"…"

"…"

We each sat still, staring blankly at the two flaming pillars.

Why had the corpses scattered around Klitz Point turned into zombies?

Did something like that happen at Als Point as well?

So did that mean that the three Points at the front line were similarly affected?

-*Tak*

Ellen, who was next to me, rested her head on my shoulder.

There were just too many unanswered questions.

"…"

"…"

However, we were too tired to share our thoughts.

"Sleep."

"…Yes."

Leaning on my shoulder, Ellen closed her eyes.

CHAPTER 165

The next day—

Both Ellen and I woke up as it turned to dawn.

We fell asleep, leaning on each other, with our backs against the wall of a building.

We were so exhausted that we had stopped thinking about what might happen. We just completely gave up thinking and fell asleep. Well, it was more like losing consciousness than falling asleep.

“Are you up?”

Eleris greeted us calmly as if she had been awake for quite some time already. Ellen looked confused.

“Could it be that you haven’t slept at all… Because of us?”

“No, I’ve been sleeping like a lot… That sure was quite risky, for all of us to be like that.”

She said that, but she obviously didn’t sleep. When I woke up, I found it quite unfathomable that I had managed to sleep in that kind of environment.

There were piles of charred corpses and flesh as well as blood scattered everywhere. The smell of those burned corpses was also incredibly rancid.

“There’s some cold water at the inn. Let’s eat something and leave. We should clean this place up a little first though.”

We decided to clean up our mess first.

* * *

The zombies had been turned to ashes. Like that, they wouldn’t be able to ever rise again. I didn’t know if the fire we lit was just that powerful or if Eleris did something

while we were sleeping.

Ellen and I washed our dirty bodies in the inn where the zombies had been roaming around. We could change our clothes, but we couldn't really do anything about our armor—we had to put them on.

We also had time to maintain our swords, but I only wiped mine with some oil since they had an automatic repair function.

After a simple breakfast, we got ready.

"Should we just keep going South?"

Eleris tilted her head, posing that question. It encompassed various meanings. We had already encountered a large number of zombies that mysteriously appeared in Klitz Point.

The further down south we went, the more dangerous things would get.

She asked if we would continue even while knowing what might await us. Eleris would protect us if anything were to happen, but she still left the decision up to us.

"What about you, Ms. Relya?"

Ellen asked for Relya's opinion. We were faced with an unexpected threat the previous day, but we knew that things might get very dangerous for us going forward.

"Well, I'll leave the choice up to you."

Relya left the decision-making up to us.

At that moment, Ellen looked at me.

Up to that point, Ellen had made the decisions on her own and took action, but at that time, she included all of us. My life had been threatened the previous day; that could happen again, or I might fall into an even more dangerous situation.

She was asking me if I still wanted to go, despite knowing the risks.

"…If you go, then I'll go as well; if you won't, then I won't either."

Of course, I left it up to Ellen. Both of us suffered from some mental damage when we annihilated the bandits, though in different ways.

Dealing with those Undead was more of a mental issue than a physical one as well. It was incredibly taxing to deal with the abominations.

"…Will you be fine?"

Ellen stared at me as she asked me that. She was asking if I could really endure any more of it.

"…I don't think I would have been okay if I was alone."

"…"

"Well, I think I'll manage somehow."

Ellen nodded when she heard my answer.

" Yes."

Ellen looked between Eleris and me.

"I'm of the same opinion."

Just being with someone helped one endure even the greatest of horrors.

It seemed that Ellen was the same as me in that regard.

In the end, we decided to continue to go south.

* * *

We headed south along the road to Als Point. Ellen was warier of her surroundings than before but still posed various questions.

"How did the zombies know where we were right away?

It was a question directed to Eleris. The previous day, Eleris gave us an immediate answer as to what zombies were and how we could deal with them during our small crisis.

As a wizard, one had to play one more role as well. A limitless encyclopedia of knowledge—that was what Eleris had seemed like.

Of course, she didn't know about those things because she was a wizard, but because she came from the Darklands. Ellen seemed to have misunderstood her knowledge as part of her being a wizard, though.

"Zombies can track down living creatures. I don't know if they do it by smell or by some kind of instinct, so there's no point in even attempting to hide from zombies."

So the battle was inevitable.

"We'd have to fight if we come across zombies again."

"Yes, but zombies usually only come out at night, so we should be careful during the night."

According to Eleris, zombies were nocturnal creatures.

"Then they are sleeping during the day or… something like that?"

At my question, Eleris put her index finger on her lips as she looked far away.

"I don't know if you could call that state sleeping or not. It is said that zombies move to shaded or cold places during the day… They'll probably wait there until nightfall, but I'm not sure if they are sleeping or something similar."

"Why do they go to cold places?"

That was when Ellen expressed her doubts.

"Probably to limit the speed of their decay."

Decay…

Their decay would progress rapidly during the day because of the high temperature.

“Zombies are usually dead beings. As their bodies are already dead, they would continue to decay, right? So if the decay continued, the only thing remaining would be nothing but bones in the end.”

Eleris lifted her index finger and explained as such. She explained something pretty horrible while making some pretty cute gestures.

A zombie was a reanimated corpse, more or less, but their decay would eventually progress like normal. Flies and maggots would feast on them.

So they actually had a very short life span, if one could call those things living beings, that is.

In the end, only bones would remain.

Although zombies didn’t have a shred of intelligence in them, they still wanted to extend their lifespan instinctively, huh?

“And when they have reached that state, their behavior changes completely.”

Didn’t they have a limited lifespan? How would they change? Seeing the look on my face, Eleris smiled strangely.

“What would you call a zombie moving around with nothing but bones left?”

Ah…

Is that what it was?

“…A skeleton?”

“Ah.”

“Correct.”

When the progress of a zombie’s decay reached its final stages, they would turn into a skeleton from a zombie.

They were both undead monsters, after all.

* * *

“You know a lot.”

Eleris was a bit startled at Ellen’s words, thinking that she might suspect something.

“Ah, that’s… I read these things from books. I thought I should at least skim them, just in case.”

“Okay.”

To me, Ellen didn’t really seem particularly suspicious of anything. Ellen turned her gaze back to Eleris, who wondered what she wanted to ask next.

“You’re quite skillful with a sling…”

“On my level, I can’t just blindly believe in my magic. I have to prepare other means to defend myself. I’ve been using it as a hobby since I was little, so I’d say I’m pretty good with it.”

Since she was supposed to be a low-ranking wizard, she couldn’t just solve everything with her magic, so she prepared a secondary weapon. Of course, her accuracy when using her sling was more than ridiculous, and as soon as the shots hit the zombies’ heads, they had exploded.

There was great power behind her shots—incomparable to any low-level magic spell.

Eleris took out the slingshot she used previously from her bosom.

“There are even some enchantments placed on it.”

“Enchantments?”

“Yes.”

So that wasn’t just a normal slingshot but secretly a magical artifact?

“The enchantment placed on it is ‘Weight increase'. The things that you shoot with this sling gain more than double their weight for a very short period of time.”

“Ah… So it had that kind of power…”

So there was a reason why the zombies’ heads didn’t just break but exploded. Even a very light object could become as heavy as a cannonball if thrown using that slingshot.

Ellen didn’t ask her why she didn’t bring it out during our annihilation of the bandits. Did she already think of it as a thing of the past?

…But was that really a magic artifact?

Didn’t she just cast some weight-increasing magic on the projectiles as she tossed them with the sling?

I couldn’t really ask Eleris those things at the moment, so I couldn’t help but be confused.

“Then how are zombies made?”

That was the most important question. Eleris furrowed her brows and tilted her head at Ellen’s question.

“Well… Zombies can occur naturally, or they can be made artificially through black magic.”

Zombie outbreaks could be either a natural occurrence or artificially made.

“However, if the zombies were created by a black mage, they’d be controlled by the same wizard. Yesterday’s zombies, however… There was no sign of them being controlled, right?”

“Yes.”

Zombies had just suddenly appeared from all directions, drawn to us. It didn’t feel like there was any kind of strategy behind their behavior or movement.

"Of course… There’s still the chance that black magic was involved in all this, but at this point, I’m assuming that they were natural zombies.”

Eleris seemed to think that the zombie outbreak was unlikely to be the work of a

black mage.

“When do zombies naturally occur then?”

Eleris frowned again at my question.

“Well… There are so many causes that I can’t put them into words, but if I had to explain it in simple terms… Strange phenomena occur in places filled with unclean energy, and the occurrence of zombies is one of those phenomena… I think that should be enough.”

Unclean energy…

It was a bit too vague to actually understand how that incident happened. However, simply put, a lot of strange things happened in ’unclean’ places, and zombies were one of those strange things.

That meant that the place had already turned into such an unclean place.

Eleris looked at the winding road stretching into the south.

“We’ll just have to find out just what on earth is causing this energy to accumulate.”

We were all aware that things would become more dangerous the further south we got.

“If such phenomena spread all the way from Als Point…”

“Yes, something truly unusual must have happened, to say the least.”

If Als Point was the core of that incident, to the point that such strange phenomena even occurred in Klitz Point, which was a three-day journey away, then it was more than clear that something outlandishly unusual was taking place there.

“Ms. Relya.”

“Yes?"

Ellen quietly called out to ‘Relya’.

“You can go back, Ms. Relya.”

She tilted her head when she was told that she could go back if she wanted.

“Reinhardt and I have Teleportation scrolls, so you can just go back separately. If an emergency were to occur, we could always escape with these scrolls.”

It would be dangerous if we continued to go together, and we had an escape route, but she didn’t, so Ellen suggested that she go back.

She worried about ‘Relya’.

“You’d get paid pretty well if you just went back and reported that Zombie incident we came across in Klitz Point.”

“Ah… I see.”

Eleris nodded quietly as if she knew what Ellen was trying to say. She smiled a little.

“It’s okay. I also have at least one trump card up my sleeve.”

She might ask what that would be.

“Something like the sword that Ellen took out yesterday."

I didn’t ask about your circumstances, so don’t ask about mine

That was what she was trying to convey, so Ellen couldn’t really bring herself to ask.

She bit her lip before murmuring silently.

“If it becomes dangerous, I hope you won’t blame us for teleporting away without you.”

“Of course. If you have a way to survive, you should use it.”

Ellen seemed to find it increasingly harder to comprehend that wizard called Relya.

However, in the short time we had known each other, we had ended up fighting for our lives together twice.

So Ellen couldn't simply disregard Relya's opinion. She seemed slightly less suspicious of her.

* * *

It was a three-day trip to Als Point. We would arrive there after approximately two more days.

We walked all day southbound. Nothing really unexpected happened during our march.

"More zombies might come out again like yesterday. We should avoid camping completely in the open."

Eleris and I agreed to Ellen's judgment. If there were any zombies around us, they could immediately pinpoint our location, so hiding was more than meaningless to begin with.

"I wish we could camp somewhere close to a cliff where Zombies couldn't climb up… Although, I don't see anything like that close by. Then, maybe on a big tree, while that would be a bit uncomfortable, we have no other choice but to sleep in a place like that."

"That's a good idea."

We might not be able to sleep properly, and we might fall off if we fell asleep on top of that tree; however, it was the best resting place we could choose at that moment, as zombies wouldn't be able to get to us even if they appeared again.

We continued to walk until the sun was about to set, making sure that we found an appropriate tree to climb up and sleep on.

Soon, the thin twig-like trees parted before us, allowing our gazes to fall on a beautiful, thick, old tree.

"That one looks pretty sturdy."

Zombies couldn't climb trees, so it seemed like we could rest on one of that tree's thick and sturdy branches. Ellen and I had experience climbing palm trees on that deserted island.

“…But how do we climb this?”

But we managed to do that because we could actually grab around the tree. It was impossible for us to climb up the tree we were looking at with our bare hands.

Ellen didn’t answer, rummaged through her backpack, and pulled out a rope.

“…Right.”

I didn’t even think about using other tools but single-mindedly thought about somehow doing it only with my body. A slow brain would make one’s body suffer.

Ellen tied a stone to one end of the rope and threw it over a branch. The rope with the stone on its end rotated around the branch three or four times, tightly winding itself around it.

Ellen tested the stability of the fastened rope by pulling on it a few times, then grabbed it and started climbing.

Ellen, after climbing more than six meters in but an instant, landed on a branch, making the branch sway a few times with her feet.

-It’s sturdy. Come on up.

There didn’t seem to be any problem. I grabbed the rope and started climbing as well. Things that wouldn’t have been possible in the past became effortless, so I was a little surprised when I managed to climb up so well.

When I got up and decided to look down a bit, I felt dizzy. Of course, the branch was considerably thick, so I honestly thought that I could lie down on it without a problem.

However, regardless of how sturdy it was, wouldn’t I still end up breaking my neck if I fell asleep there?

Ellen looked down and shouted.

“Ms. Relya, if you hold on to the rope, I can pull you up.”

- Okay.

Since not everyone could climb a tree like that, Ellen seemed to want to try and pull Eleris up there herself. Eleris grabbed the rope, and Ellen pulled her up quickly—as if she wasn't heavy at all.

"Wow, you're so strong."

Eleris looked at Ellen, who had just lifted her up without exerting much strength, talking to her with admiration. At that height, even if a whole horde of zombies came, they would have no choice but look up at us dumbly.

Ellen quickly moved and leaped over to other branches, climbing up even higher. It looked like she was searching for an even better place.

As a result, she found something like a cave inside the huge tree trunk—it was like a crack that one usually saw in old trees.

"I don't think we'll fall if we stay in there. It's spacious enough."

"Yes."

Although it would be a bit cramped, it seemed that three people could somehow sleep in there. Even if we tossed and turned a bit in our sleep, we would be inside the tree, so we wouldn't have to worry about falling down.

Of course, our posture would be a bit uncomfortable.

"…"

"…"

I was in the hollow tree, Ellen was in my arms, and Eleris was sitting opposite me.

It wasn't that big after all, so Ellen was sleeping with her back against my chest.

It kind of seemed like I was hugging her from behind. We both had to sleep in that posture.

"Hey, you seem to be getting along very well…"

Eleris looked at me with a soft gaze, teasing me a little.

Stop talking nonsense!

“Let’s eat something.”

Of course, Ellen had her back to me, not even giving the whole setup a second thought and talking about food.

* * *

It was a relatively safe place. We still could hear the sound of zombies slowly gathering, but we couldn’t do anything about that. We set up a guarding rotation again.

—Two hours each.

I took the first shift that time. The darkness of night fell over us, and Eleris and Ellen both fell asleep. I didn’t know if Eleris was really sleeping or not. However, wasn’t she staying up for far too long, considering that she didn’t sleep much at all? She must have been under a lot of pressure.

I thought it would be nice if Eleris found some rest as well. We were safe for the moment, after all.

Ellen was fast asleep, her breath low and even.

She wiggled for a bit as if she felt slightly uncomfortable, but it seemed like she didn’t care much. Normally, even if one didn’t really pay attention to those kinds of things or didn’t care for them, one would still feel their heart pounding a bit in that kind of situation.

I was just as sensitive to the situation as Ellen seemed to be.

I felt like it wouldn’t even be strange if a ghost were to suddenly appear.

I was originally the type that hated jumpscares or anything having to do with ghosts.

However, because I had seen so many things that were even more frightening, I felt like I wouldn’t actually mind seeing some.

If zombies were to pop up, how should we respond? There weren't any tree-climbing

types among them, right?

All sorts of weird thoughts swam around my mind in that darkness.

“Uurg…”

However, nothing much was happening except for Ellen wiggling and letting out strange groans in her sleep.

CHAPTER 166

—The next day.

Fortunately, nothing really happened, and we could simply continue our journey after climbing down the tree.

What would we do if the incident was something even Eleris couldn't handle?

Of course, we could just escape using the scroll, and Eleris could use Teleportation.

We continued south, believing in our own countermeasures. If we kept up our pace, we would be able to reach Als Point by the next day, and if we managed to get back safely to St. Point, after taking a look at the situation over there, our mission would be over.

After a light meal, we diligently walked ahead. Judging by the previous day's situation, there didn't seem to be any zombies present, but we had no other choice but to be concerned about our safety. We climbed on top of a rocky protrusion of a cliff and rested on its flat surface.

As it was placed on top of a mountain, we could see far in every direction.

However, no matter where we looked, it was just mountains upon mountains, so we couldn't really see anything suspicious at all.

"…"

"…"

"It feels creepy."

I could feel an unidentifiable eerie feeling tickling at the back of my head. It would have been better if something actually showed up, but nothing like that happened, so it felt even stranger.

* * *

—The next day.

We set off early in the morning. If we started walking only after the sun rose, we would arrive at Als Point after sunset, so we decided to set off very early, take a look, and then go back during the night.

“Let’s be very careful and rush back if we find out that Als Point is threatened by something serious.”

Ellen felt just that nervous to the point where she would say those kinds of things, even though nothing had happened yet.

With the awareness that we would be heading straight to the heart of all those incidents, we kept on walking, except for a few short breaks in between.

It seemed to be around five in the afternoon.

“That’s… Als Point.”

As we crossed over another hill, we found Als Point located at the foot of said hill. We stopped for a moment, not approaching it immediately. We had to first understand the situation of Als Point.

“There doesn’t seem to be any problem with it when looking at it from the outside…”

At Ellen’s words, I also tried to enhance my eyesight a bit, but I couldn’t find anything other than that Als Point seemed rather gloomy and that I couldn’t see anyone walking around.

“I’ll use a Telescope spell.”

Eleris used a low-ranking spell to view the situation more clearly from a distance.

After casting for some time, Eleris stared intently at Als Point.

“It’s a little different… From what happened in Klitz Point. There aren’t any zombies. None at all…”

Eleris murmured blankly.

“It seems more like the corpses have been eaten… I can see leftovers everywhere… Bone fragments and such…”

Remnants that seemed to hint at all the corpses having been eaten. That’s what one would see if one were to zoom in on the Point.

“What ate them?”

“…I think zombies did this.”

Hints of Zombies having eaten people could be seen. However, as time had passed, there were only remains left.

“Although it rained quite heavily recently, we should still see some footprints if anyone came or went since then, but there are none.”

It had rained when we went to annihilate those bandits.

At that time, any traces, footprints included, were completely washed away. However, there were no footprints or other traces of anyone coming or going ever since then.

“It seems like Als Point has been abandoned for a while already. If zombies appeared here as well, they would be all over the place.”

“There was no reason for them to return to Als Point, as no one was left alive. They only attack the living… Right?”

“Yes.”

If zombies had appeared there before, they had long left Als Point. The Point had been devoid of anything for quite some time already.

If one wanted to return from the front lines, namely Als Point one, two, and three, one had to pass through Als Point. Ellen seemed to have organized her thoughts and spoke quite curtly.

“So no one came back from the other three Points ahead…”

“…I guess so.”

The other three Points might have been wiped out already.

None of us could deny that it was quite likely.

“Let’s go check for now."

There didn’t seem to be anything strange about the place at first, so we decided to get a closer look at Als Point.

* * *

Just seeing a village completely devoid of any person gave one a creepy and eerie feeling.

However, if one were to see blood all over the buildings of that village, it would instill fear in anyone who saw it.

There were bits of bones all over the place as well.

Als Point was the waypoint to the three frontline bases ahead; hence it was three times the size of St. Point and Klitz Point. However, there wasn’t a single soul in that huge Point.

We searched Als Point’s vicinity with tension in our hearts. We didn’t see any survivors or zombies, but we didn't know what might come out to attack us.

Acting separately could be dangerous, so we went through each building together.

There were bloodstains and bone fragments scattered everywhere. The bones were already completely dry; they didn’t even emit the usual rotting smell, perhaps because the maggots had already gotten to them.

“Did they really get attacked by zombies?”

Looking at the pieces of the bones that had been eaten clean, Eleris expressed her doubts, her expression very serious.

“No. I don’t think so.”

Ellen shook her head, however. She looked at the bloodstains smeared on the wall.

“If zombies had attacked them to the point of destruction, there should have been more bones. However, while there are some pieces of bone scattered around that seemed to have been eaten clean by zombies, we can’t really say that these were all the people of Als Point.”

There were clear signs of predation, but their number was just too small.

“Perhaps they weren’t eaten while they were alive, but after they died.”

Ellen picked up one of the dry pieces of white bone.

“Because decapitated corpses probably can’t turn into zombies.”

The bones seemed to have been cut through with a blade or something as sharp.

“The people in Als Point were slaughtered by someone or a group holding weapons, and after the massacre took place, zombies came and cleaned up the place.”

They didn’t devour living people but corpses that couldn’t turn into zombies.

That was the conclusion Ellen seemed to have reached.

* * *

Traces of sword cuts could be found on some of the bone fragments.

I didn’t know who the culprit was, but it could be concluded that they had very sharp blades with them—they had to be sharp enough to kill people in a single stroke.

And such weapons were by no means common.

Creating something with that sharpness wasn’t possible with common smithing, after all.

We carefully searched through the Point again.

“Let’s go to the Adventurers Guild."

Ellen headed to the Adventurers Guild in Als Point as if she knew exactly where to go.

There were traces of blood everywhere in the Adventurers Guild building.

There was a reason why Ellen had gone there.

“We need to find the Adventurers Guild’s log. Most of what went on at Als Point should be recorded there.”

There seemed to be a high chance that we would gain a major clue. Ellen already knew what to look for.

While searching through the Adventurers Guild’s building, she found a huge book in the manager’s office.

“I think this is the manager’s log.”

“Let’s take a look.”

Ellen opened the log.

The last recorded date in the log seemed to be Tuesday, July 21st.

For us, it was Friday, August 7th.

So the incident in Als Point had taken place about three weeks prior.

* * *

Tuesday, July 21st, Year 323 of the Imperial Calendar.

-I shouldn’t have sent people to that tomb.

Snoton will kill us all.

That was the last entry. What tomb?

Was the tomb the reason for everything?

And that name, Snoton…

Ellen turned the pages, looking for the first mention of the tomb.

Thursday, July 2nd, Year 323 of the Imperial Calendar.

-Three adventurers, A-Rank Snoton, B-Rank Paijin, and B-Rank Lyzer, reported finding unusual structures about two days east of Als Point. According to their sketch, it is presumed to be a tomb due to its enclosed nature. Since they are a party with high integrity, there is only a low possibility that the information provided is false.

As the information has already spread, it seems like a large-scale expedition team is being formed to properly research the place.

Adventurers of Als Point had discovered a tomb more than a month prior and set up an expedition team to search it. They didn't know what dangers might await them, hence why they put together a team.

Sunday, July 12th, Year 323 of the Imperial Calendar.

-An expedition consisting of A to C Rank adventurers, who left to investigate the tomb to the east of Als Point, returned.

According to their reports, it was composed of three tombs, and there were no dangerous Demons or other threats in them.

They returned with a large amount of jewelry and precious metals. It was a considerable haul.

There were also some items that seemed to be enchanted among them. Detailed results will be available after the appraisal.

In such cases, conflicts with bloody ends might crop up among them to gain even a little more, and such a situation must be prevented by all means.

As a special note, they said that they found a sword in one of the three tomb's coffins.

It seems that Snoton, the leader of the expedition team, had decided to keep it as his loot.

No one seemed to have objected to that.

'A sword found in a tomb's coffin.'

'Maybe the adventurers touched something they shouldn't have.'

I felt a certain sense of unease.

Tuesday, July 14th, Year 323 of the Imperial Calendar.

-Fortunately, the expedition team members divided the loot among themselves without fighting. Their reward was enormous, so there seemed to be enough for everyone, leaving no reason for them to fight.

We could identify a total of two magic artifacts: There was a pair of earrings and a bracelet, which were taken by the other two.

Snoton's sword was also believed to be a magical artifact. However, the man himself said that it didn't need to be appraised.

Wednesday, July 16th, Year 323 of the Imperial Calendar.

-Last night, I had a nightmare.

Curiously, all the people in Als Point had nightmares. The content was different and completely incomprehensible, but how is it possible that everyone was plagued by night terrors at the exact same time?

Thursday, July 17th, Year 323 of the Imperial Calendar.

-Zombies suddenly rose from the burial site next to the Point and killed three people. Action was taken immediately, but why did this happen?

I keep getting this ominous feeling.

Friday, July 18th, Year 323 of the Imperial Calendar.

-Snoton is acting strange. I was told that he would sleep while holding that sword he brought from the tomb. He became less talkative, and it seems like he doesn't eat anything. It's as if he became a completely different person. Snoton's comrades have reported that the sword must contain some ominous magic.

Will investigate that matter tomorrow.

Saturday, July 19th, Year 323 of the Imperial Calendar.

-Snoton didn't give any reaction to my suggestion that the sword might be a product of black magic.

He only smiled strangely and said strange things. No, what left his mouth didn't even sound like words.

It was more than certain that Snoton was under some kind of curse. When we tried to take the sword away by force, he killed three guild members, even his two old comrades who were with him, and ran away.

I became increasingly afraid to get to the bottom of this.

Snoton's sword was definitely cursed. A search party has been created to track down Snoton.

Sunday, July 20th, Year 323 of the Imperial Calendar.

-The search party organized to subdue Snoton was slaughtered by him as soon as they

left the Point.

After killing the search party, Snoton disappeared again.

Snoton was known to be outstanding, but he shouldn't have been that skillful.

Everyone was thrown into confusion.

There were those who said that they wanted to escape the Point and those who said that they'll get killed by Snoton if they did, creating chaos.

That tomb.

That tomb is the root of all this.

"…"

Having grasped everything, we looked at each other. That gave us a rough idea of their situation.

—The adventurers touched something they shouldn't have touched.

They left the tomb with a cursed sword. A crazy adventurer named Snoton, who claimed ownership of this sword, was actually the culprit of the incident. He caused carnage at every turn, spreading the curse of turning the dead into zombies around him. The curse seemed to have gradually spread on its own.

"It could be the type of sword that brainwashes its owner."

Eleris spoke with a firm expression on her face, guessing that the problem was caused by that sword. Ellen put the log into her backpack.

"Let's return. Our mission is over."

Our mission was to figure out what happened at Als Point, and we could prove that with that log.

With that, our mission was over.

We weren't supposed to solve the problem but simply find out the truth behind it.

Now that we knew the identity of the person who ended up destroying Als Point, we could leave the rest to someone else.

—A cursed sword, and an adventurer who went crazy because of its curse.

This should be judged as a catastrophe brought about by someone touching something they should have left undisturbed.

We left the Adventurers' Guild and proceeded to head outside of Als Point. The area had to be dangerous, so we planned to leave the vicinity of Als point as fast as possible without even resting.

"…Of course, it has to turn out like this again."

Someone was standing at the entrance of Als Point, the place we had passed before.

It was a man with sparse, gray hair, empty eyes, and gray skin.

He was simply standing there holding a certain sword.

It seemed like he was trying to stop us from leaving.

—Snoton, the culprit behind Als Point's destruction. It was more than obvious that it was him. The man didn't come closer, but he didn't move away either. He was simply blocking our way out.

"…It doesn't look like he's alive."

Those were Eleris' words.

That man clearly seemed to have neither will nor ego. It was enough to look into that guy's eyes to see that.

The owner was already dead, and that body was only driven by the curse of that sword.

He wasn't the only one around.

-Kweeeeek!

-Grrrr! Grr!

"…Zombies as well?"

At the other entrance of Als Point, zombies were appearing one after the other.

We had fallen into another dangerous situation. Snoton, who was under an unknown curse, was in front of us, and behind us was a horde of zombies.

If we got surrounded by the zombies, it would be over for us. At Klitz Point, we were only able to break through them by killing them one by one, but if they were to attack as a group, we wouldn't be able to stop them.

There weren't that many Zombies yet.

"…We have to get past him."

Although we didn't really know who he was, that cursed man was marking the entrance.

If we weren't able to get out of there, we'd die. Ellen didn't seem to consider using the Teleportation scroll yet.

She seemed to think that Relya would end up dying if we left her. She never said that the trump card she held would help her get out of a situation like that.

"I don't know what that trump card you were talking about is, but can it stop those zombies?"

Eleris nodded her head with a hard expression at Ellen's question.

"…Use it. But if it gets dangerous, you have to escape. Don't care about us."

"…Yes."

It seemed that Eleris had decided not to stop Ellen from her risky plan.

-Shiiing

Ellen, after she summoned Lament, looked at me.

"Let's fight together."

"Yeah."

We had one opponent.

His combat power was unpredictable, but he'd have to face us two-on-one.

CHAPTER 167

The difference between Snoton and us was quite obvious.

-Kaang!

Just by blocking his sword, I was pushed back a few steps by the sheer force behind it.

I felt a sharp pain run through my hands. It was incomparable to the time I fought with Mayarton.

It was a good thing that I didn't end up letting go of my sword.

Before, I would have definitely let go of it.

"…"

-Groooooowl!

The zombies behind us were charging at Eleris.

-Gruaaaaar!

-Gruuaaaarg!

Eleris had probably decided to stop pretending that she was a low-ranking wizard. The fireballs she kept throwing were proof of that. However, Ellen didn't have the leeway to be shocked at Eleris's prowess.

-Kang! Kang! Kakag!

"Ku… Huk!"

Just blocking his strikes was almost unbearable. Aside from his skill, his strength and reflexes were already on a completely different level from mine.

-Kaaang!

“Kuhk!”

Fortunately, there were two of us. If he attacked one of us, he would always be exposed to the other’s attack.

-Whoosh!

I swung my sword at his back as he was deflecting Ellen’s sword.

However, he didn’t seem to care about any wounds inflicted to him, so he just swung his sword right at me. I pulled out the sword in an instant and stepped back. However, if that guy had swung even a little farther, he would have managed to cut my head off.

I stabbed him deeply, but it didn’t seem that he would die from that wound any time soon.

“What bullshit…”

-Heal…

However, I didn’t expect that the wound would almost instantly heal itself.

Both Ellen and I looked at that scene in disbelief.

—Regeneration.

“We should cut, not stab him."

“Yeah.”

We had to cut him and kill him in a single strike.

If it were a one-on-one, we wouldn’t have been a match for him, but the effects of our well-coordinated cooperation showed great results.

Like that, the overwhelming power difference could be overcome. Ellen and I practiced a lot with each other. Although we had never practiced for cooperative battles, we were able to predict what the other was planning on doing to some extent.

It wasn't really because we had fantastic chemistry or anything but because we were used to fighting against each other.

The guy focused more on Ellen as if he instinctively realized that she was the more threatening party. After a few exchanges of blows, I swung my sword towards his neck.

-*Puck! Snap!*

Like slashing off the zombies' necks before, I managed to slice through his neck while he was blocking Ellen's swing. His head was cut off in a single swing.

"That… Crazy…"

The fallen head began to attach itself to his neck again.

Even though his head was just cut off and immediately returned back to him, his expression didn't change a single bit. We couldn't read any form of emotion from his eyes, it was as if they were completely devoid of any form of life.

When I looked at that guy, he gave off a completely different feeling than those zombies.

I felt like I was looking at a completely different being, neither human nor undead.

—Overwhelming power, reaction speed, and regeneration.

"That sword."

In that situation where information about the enemy was scarce, all we could do was guess.

"We have to get that sword out of his hands."

The only clue I had was that the sword was the source of everything.

If that guy's regenerative powers also came from that sword, then we would have to get that sword away from him, no matter what.

If that didn't work either, we could still think of our next move after we tried.

In the worst-case scenario, we could always escape by teleporting away.

Snoton lunged at us. I was his target.

"Hap!"

If I tried to block that, I would be pushed away by his sheer force. Hence I had to use his own force against him by deflecting it or following his strike. He obviously had the upper hand in terms of strength, but his technique was lacking.

His swordsmanship couldn't even be compared to Ellen's. That Ellen had been my sparring partner for quite some time.

I had learned how to react when faced with an opponent with overwhelming strength. I had to learn those skills, as Ellen far outstripped me in sheer power as well.

I was used to fighting with someone with overwhelming power!

-Kakang!

"Kurk!"

He was distracted while attacking me and didn't notice Ellen's sword coming in from the side. Ellen definitely had the technical advantage, and I was also a bit superior in technique; we were also attacking him at the same time.

I wasn't sure how things would end if we were to face that infinitely regenerating enemy one-on-one, but with the two of us, we were able to take him on.

Next, he struck out towards Ellen.

-Baam!

“!”

Something unbelievable happened.

Ellen took that bastard's sword strike with her body. However, rather than blood spurting out, she was covered in a light blue light.

Rather, she actually hugged that sword as if she didn’t intend to let go of it at all.

The disposable protective bracelet. I remembered it at that moment.

A single defensive artifact could create such a huge gap, huh?

“Reinhardt!”

My body was already reacting when she shouted.

“Just give me your fucking arm!”

-Crunch!

I swung my sword with all my might, cutting off Snoton’s wrist.

-Klaang!

Ellen immediately kicked the sword away as soon as it hit the ground.

“Kuaaaaaaark!”

The guy screamed all of a sudden and ran towards his severed hand. It was as if he just suddenly lost his temper, even though he had been completely calm up until then.

The hand did not stick back to his wrist anymore; it didn’t regenerate, either.

The sword that had been kicked away was shaking and trembling.

With that, one could say that separating the sword from him was the right answer.

-Thud!

Ellen hit the man in the stomach after he tried running towards the sword and knocked him out.

“Weak…!”

As if that monstrous power just up and left his body, he went out really easily. A babbling man and a humming and trembling sword were both lying on the ground.

Ellen swung Lament at Snoton, who didn’t move, and cut off his head.

"Keeeaaark!”

With that, the man’s body, which had been trembling like crazy up until then, fell completely limp.

-Wooooh!

However, it didn’t end there.

The sword began to float in the air all of a sudden and flew off towards none other than one of the zombies Eleris was annihilating.

-Kwak!

“…”

And then, one of the zombies ended up catching it. To be precise, it was as if he had ordered one of the zombies to catch it.

The cursed sword flew towards its next owner.

* * *

A zombie with its abilities strengthened ran towards me with that sword.

-Kaang!

“Kuhuk!”

Just a single swing of the sword pushed me far back.

The sword strengthened whoever its host was.

Even if we cut off that zombie's arm again, the sword would just fly off to a different zombie. It seemed more than clear that it controlled all the zombies around it.

If we didn't do something about the sword itself, the situation would only repeat over and over. Eleris was doing the most important thing in getting rid of the zombie swarm. It was best to kill off all the zombies and then cut off the host's hand.

I couldn't keep up with that thing with my physical strength alone.

The good thing was that the thing put a lot of trust in its own power, so it just pushed ahead with that. Like that, it was possible for me to stall it a bit.

However, the burden on my body was increasing by the minute.

My whole body ached.

-*Swish!*

"…"

And I felt like that sword was actually learning. It dodged Ellen's attack that was aimed at its arm.

Knowing that we were aiming to cut off its arm, it was only focused on those attacks.

All its other wounds would regenerate anyway. The zombie kept on recovering with the power of the sword.

-*Bang! Babang! Bang!*

Eleris couldn't keep blocking that zombie horde as well. Did she think we could manage on our own? Would she be able to protect us if it really became dangerous?

Asking those kinds of questions was impossible in that situation. I had no idea if Eleris still had enough strength left, and I don't think I would have actually believed her if she did say she could handle everything.

We had to come up with something on our own without asking Eleris for help.

I shouldn’t lean too much on my insurance.

My whole body felt numb. My wrists and shoulders felt like they were about to break every time I had to deflect those blows.

“We can’t let this become a war of attrition.”

We had to avoid a war of attrition at any rate. However, the opponent’s stamina and strength seemed endless, and just after engaging with it for a short period of time, it was already clear that we were about to be totally defeated. It was obvious that Ellen had also suffered from severe physical strain.

But how were we supposed to avoid that situation?

During that standoff, Ellen called out to me.

“Reinhardt.”

“Yes.”

If it just kept exchanging owners, then it wouldn’t be a threat anymore, so we just had to keep cutting off the host’s arm.

Ellen seemed to have determined that she was able to cut off that zombie's arm on her own.

But if we didn’t cooperate, how were we supposed to deal with it?

“Don’t interfere from now on.”

Ellen took a deep breath.

* * *

—Before leaving for the Darklands.

‘Hey. Hit me hard.’

‘…What?’

It was the day Loyar asked Ellen if she could die for Reinhardt, and she said she didn't know.

Loyar told her that she had something to say to her.

'Try to hit me wherever you want, as hard as you can.'

'…'

'What? Ya wanna get hit instead?'

'I'll do it.'

As she ordered, Ellen whacked Loyar in the stomach with all her might. A sound that almost seemed like a roar could be heard, but Loyar seemed to be completely unharmed, although she got only pushed back slightly.

When she had first encountered Loyar, she controlled her strength a little, but that time, she definitely used all her power.

Although Loyar wasn't hurt in the least, she wondered if the fist that hit her was completely broken.

'You know what I did, right?'

'…Body strengthening using magical power.'

'Correct.'

Loyar was able to protect and strengthen her body with magical power.

'There is a huge difference between someone who knows how to do this and the one who doesn't. It's like magic. Not everyone can do this. Just as there are only very few wizards, there are just as few people who have the talent to manage to pull off this skill.'

'…'

'I won't tell you why I can do it, so there's no point in looking at me like that.'

Just as there were few people with the talent to become a wizard, there were few people who were able to strengthen their bodies with magical power, and those who could were considered to have entered the realm of superhumans. There were even fewer who managed to master this skill.

‘I mean, if you can’t use magic, you won’t be able to beat me until you kick the bucket. It would be different if you used that weird sword of yours. However, it wouldn’t make much of a difference.’

They were on markedly different levels.

Therefore, Ellen would never be able to defeat Loyar to begin with unless she exceeded her limits.

‘I don’t think they’re gonna teach you that at Temple. Not yet, at least. If you practice this the wrong way… It’s hard to put into words, but you will die after bleeding from every pore of your body. You can’t learn magic if you aren’t smart, but this skill will cause you to bleed out if you can’t do it properly and still want to use it, so one should be very careful when teaching this skill.'

Magical Body Strengthening.

It was a double-edged sword. Therefore, only people with appropriate talents were selected to learn it and they were taught with utter care. If one did a bad job teaching them, that would cause the loss of valuable talents and lives.

'If it’s a skill only geniuses are eligible to learn, then only geniuses can actually use it, right? So even among these geniuses, there are ordinary ones, just like there are exceptional talents among all the wizards out there. That’s how it is.’

Loyar looked at Ellen.

'You’re going to learn this really easily.'

In her view, Ellen was a monster that couldn’t be put in any category, so she didn’t have to be all too careful teaching her it.

‘Honestly, if it’s you, you probably don’t even need anyone to teach you this stuff, right?'

It didn’t even seem necessary for her to have a teacher.

‘…I don’t know how to do that.'

At Ellen’s words, Loyar only shook her head.

'You never tried doing it.’

She never learned it, so she never tried doing it before. That was only natural. Why would she use something she never learned how to do?

Ellen thought that the gray-haired aunty was talking weirdly.

‘You feel the magical power in your body, use it to your will, and then strengthen your body with it. Simple.’

That was an overly simplistic explanation of the concept of Magic Body Strengthening. It wasn’t something that could be summarized in just a few words, after all.

'It sounds simple, but why can’t anyone learn it then?’

'It only sounds simple to you.’

Loyar was confident.

‘Even though it’s hella difficult for anyone else, it’ll be hella easy for you.'

“…Why are you so sure about that?'

'I’ve never seen anyone who’s as crazily talented as you are.'

Loyar judged that no one she had ever met in her life was more talented than Ellen.

Hoping that she would always be on Reinhardt’s side, Loyar decided to teach her this.

She didn’t really have to wait for someone to teach her this skill. It might be difficult for others, but for her it would be more than simple.

‘If I do it wrong, I’ll end up vomiting blood and die.'

‘Then that’s your fate.'

‘…’

'That’s how it is. If you ever feel sick of waiting for someone to teach you, just try to do it carefully yourself. Don’t overdo it, though. If you aren’t in a hurry, you can always just wait for Temple to teach you, right?’

‘Can’t you teach me?’

'Why should I?'

What an irresponsible person.

But she was somewhat thankful to her as well.

That was what Ellen remembered.

And now, Ellen was faced with an incomprehensible enemy.

She didn’t give her that advice so that she could use it immediately in a real-life situation.

But now—

“…”

—Ellen realized that she had to do it to get out of her situation.

There was no reason for her to try something she had never properly learned. She didn’t even want to touch it because she knew how dangerous that technique was.

However, she had no other choice but to use it. Now she had a reason to try using it even though no one had taught her anything.

It was more than ridiculous to try to use magic without knowing a single thing about

how it was done.

She could simply run away with Reinhardt using the Teleportation Scroll.

But she didn't have the courage to simply run away.

She didn't know how that wizard named Relya, who said that she was a low-ranking wizard, managed to fire off so many high-ranking spells all of a sudden.

After all, she still was just a single wizard.

She wouldn't be able to deal with that monster. It was her and Reinhardt's job to take care of that thing.

The wizard was doing her job. Perfectly, at that.

She couldn't just leave her behind and run away.

She didn't have the courage to leave someone to die just to save herself.

She didn't know her well, but they had fought together multiple times.

She was neither someone precious to her nor was she someone she knew well, but she was someone that stuck with her and complied with all of her unreasonable demands. She didn't object and followed her will without saying a single word. Ellen didn't know what secrets she was hiding, but for now, it wasn't something she should think about.

Relya had seemed so saddened when she told her that they were going to kill countless people, but she eventually complied even with that unreasonable plan.

She could always dig into Relya's secrets later.

She decided not to leave her behind for now. She couldn't abandon someone who fought for her.

It was what she told Austin.

If one wasn't strong, one should at least be shameless.

Going by her words, she just completely failed by not choosing the option of abandoning her suspicious party member and shamelessly running away when faced with an overwhelming enemy.

She couldn't choose that option.

In that case, she just had to be strong.

One actually had to be strong to be shameless. One had to be strong to shamelessly survive.

So now, she had to gamble with her life on the line.

—A gamble that risked her life by using a skill she had never used in her life nor learned anything about.

She didn't have the courage to run away, so she risked her life in the name of growing stronger.

—Just like her brother did.

Since she couldn't suppress her conscience, she ended up following the same path her older brother took, who clung so dearly to his life while under constant pressure to grow strong enough to keep his conscience.

She didn't know how…

But she was going to do it.

The magical power in her body…

It would further boost the capabilities of its shell.

It would also add armor-like protection to her skin.

That gray-haired woman who could perform magic body strengthening so skillfully could take a full-blown swing with Lament like nothing just by using that skill. Ellen wasn't even on the same level as her. Just because she knew how to enhance her body with magical power to some extent didn't mean she could stop Lament's strike so easily, though.

She probably was in the master class. That was what Ellen guessed.

She wasn't even sure if she could utilize that skill properly.

She knew the desired result but not the process of how to get there.

Body strengthening.

That gray-haired aunty was sure that she would be able to use it without anyone having taught her.

"Haaaah…"

The raw material was embedded in her body, and she was going to use it to explosively boost the overall performance of her body.

Had she ever been so focused in her life?

Had she ever been this nervous in her life?

Ellen opened her eyes as a certain kind of sense was slowly awakening in her.

At that time, Ellen's eyes seemed to shine blue.

Her opponent was watching her.

-Pat!

Ellen's body suddenly disappeared.

Her speed was beyond what a human should be able to achieve.

While hovering in the air, the tip of Ellen's sword swung precisely towards the arm the zombie held its sword with. Blue energy was swirling all around Ellen's body.

-Kakaaang!

However, the zombie blocked her attack.

"This… Crazy."

The sound of Reinhardt's silent muttering reached Ellen's ears.

That monster, which they hadn't managed to push back with strength alone before, was now getting pushed away instantly.

She couldn't run away.

If she couldn't run away, then she was bound to get stronger.

Ellen calmly continued her attacks, assisted by her enhanced senses that would blow up her brain if she was careless.

* * *

I couldn't believe my eyes. Ellen was pushing back that monster that had easily overpowered us in physical strength up to that point.

-Bang! Kakaang! Kang! Kang!

It tried to block Ellen's sword strikes, but it was just getting pushed back. It seemed to be hard-pressed to defend itself.

—Magic body strengthening.

It was a core subject in Temple's curriculum and a very important part of the main story. We were supposed to learn it starting the next year. Although everyone started learning it at the same time, only Ellen would be able to awaken to it as soon as she was taught.

All combat talent students had to practice that skill and go through various trials and errors. It was a well-known fact that some people wouldn't awaken that skill even after graduating.

After awakening to the skill, Ellen quickly reached the level of a superhuman.

However, history had changed.

Ellen succeeded in awakening her magical power through her own strength.

[Achievement reached - Superhuman (Ellen Artorius)]

[Ellen Artorius entered the path towards becoming a superhuman faster than originally intended.]

[You received 500 Achievement Points.]

Ellen changed history, but I couldn't care less about that achievement at the moment. I couldn't intervene in her fight.

-Pang! Papang!

"Kuhk!"

I killed some Zombies that Eleris had missed one after the other so that they wouldn't interfere in Ellen's fight. Their degree of decay was much higher than those of Klitz Point, and it was hard to fight them with such a disgusting smell coming from those things and their even more disgusting appearance.

Cutting off their heads, I managed to kill every zombie that tried to approach Ellen.

-Bang! Bang! Bang!

I couldn't even call that the sound of swords hitting against swords anymore. It sounded like the roar of heavy weapons whacking against each other.

Ellen, who used magic body strengthening, was giving off blue energy from all over her body. She looked like a bonfire.

-Swoosh!

And with a single blow, she opened the zombie's chest.

-Swish!

Ellen went straight for the monster's defenseless arm. Like that, the sword left another pair of hands once again.

-Whoosh!

Then, Ellen beheaded the zombie after it lost the sword. Ellen had succeeded in cutting off the sword's host's arm for a second time.

-Urg! Cough! Cough!

"Ellen!"

However, as soon as Ellen dealt with the zombie, she began to cough up blood. It was already a miracle that she managed to use magic body strengthening, which he had never used in her life before. Of course, there had to be some side effects.

The situation was dire.

The sword began to move on its own again.

It was trying to find its next host.

Ellen was incapacitated. If that thing found its next host, there would be no way out.

I couldn't afford to completely rely on Eleris.

I had to do something.

I had to do something!

“This… Fucking shit!”

I flung myself forward and grabbed the handle of that sword that was about to fly through the air again.

I used Revise.

I can’t be controlled by that sword!

[The Revision cannot be performed.]

However, my expectations were completely betrayed. Couldn’t I do something so that I wouldn’t be controlled by the sword? Was there such a powerful curse placed on that sword?

But that wasn’t the reason.

[Your Talent ‘Sacred Spirit’ is protecting you.]

The Attribute I got from Olivia Lanze, Sacred Spirit, was protecting me.

CHAPTER 168

As I gripped the cursed sword, I saw that ‘Sacred Spirit’ was protecting my mind.

As soon as I held the sword in my hands, the zombies that came running towards me began to fall down like dominoes.

It was as if the cursed power that radiated from the sword itself somehow got cut off.

“Let go of it, Reinhardt!”

“Let go of the sword!”

However, both Ellen and Eleris seemed more preoccupied with the fact that I grabbed the sword rather than the fact that the fight had finally ended.

Of course, they didn’t know that I wasn’t controlled by the sword.

“…I don’t think this thing is affecting me at all, though.”

“Let go of it!"

“Let go! Hurry up!”

“Okay, okay.”

-*Pok!*

Seeing them both telling me to let go of it so frantically, I plunged the sword into the ground. Both of them were staring blankly at my action of letting go of it so arbitrarily after holding it like that.

The sword had moved on its own before. However, when I let go of it, it just stayed still as if it was dead.

It didn’t move or react. At that moment, Ellen and Eleris came over to me because they realized that the fight was over.

“Are you okay?”

“…I think I’m just a little exhausted."

Ellen seemed to be exhausted, perhaps as a side effect of using magic body strengthening. She even coughed up blood, you know?

Ellen had suddenly used magic body strengthening, which she had never used or even learned before.

I was still fine, even after I had made direct, active contact with that cursed sword that would control its host.

And Eleris, who pretended to be a low-ranked wizard, had suddenly launched one high-ranking attack spell after the other.

“…”

“…”

“…”

All of us had done something that was rather hard and complicated to put into words.

* * *

All three of us had done things that couldn’t be explained with just one or two words.

Ellen did something that was generally known to be near impossible…

I was somehow immune to that cursed sword’s mind control, incapacitating it…

And Eleris had been hiding her actual power until then. Ellen just stumbled over to my side, as she seemed completely drained.

“For now, I won’t ask why you have been hiding your power up to this point.”

“…Okay.”

Eleris was suspicious, but Ellen just had too much to think about at the moment. In the end, Ellen didn't choose to simply teleport away to save herself, even though she realized that Eleris seemed suspicious.

"This sword. Do you know what it is?"

"Ah… No, I don't know either. I'll do a quick inspection of it first."

Eleris put her hand near that bizarre sword, which completely ceased all movement. She didn't touch it, just in case.

The sword itself didn't look like anything special. It wasn't as fancy as Lament. The only color it had was from the glowing runes engraved on it.

Notably, the sword didn't have a crossguard. It was a straight sword. Its form was that of an ordinary longsword, albeit with a slightly darkish color. However, it didn't really look like a cursed sword at first glance.

The grip was wrapped in wrinkled leather, and the pommel was studded with a black, water drop-shaped obsidian or something similar.

Eleris, who seemed to be inspecting the sword for a while, sighed in the end.

"I don't know… If this were an enchanted object, I'd be able to tell what kind of enchantment had been used, but as for this sword… I have no idea. It might have been cursed… As to what curse it's under, I don't know. Curses aren't a standardized form of magic, so there could be many causes and effects. I mean, it can't be helped, as it wasn't something that has been consciously placed on it, I think."

It's not that she couldn't tell if it was cursed or not. She actually presumed that it had a curse placed on it, but she couldn't identify it. Perhaps that was just how curses were.

"But even if we don't know what the cause for the curse is, the effect is just like what we saw. This sword will control a person's mind and spread so much evil energy that it will cause undead to arise wherever it is."

"This thing's dangerous."

"Yes, very."

I wasn't controlled by the sword due to Sacred Spirit's protection. However, it would be very different for other people. It was unknown what would happen if Ellen or Eleris decided to hold that sword.

"I'll see if I can somehow dispose of this sword…"

"No, wait a sec."

It was me who cut off Eleris.

"I think I can use this."

"…What?"

"Reinhardt!"

Both Eleris and Ellen seemed to have been caught off guard by my words.

"No, look, I'm fine, right?"

Ellen's face heated up when she saw me grabbing that sword without hesitation.

"What are you doing?!"

Ellen lost her composure and yelled at me. It was my first time seeing her with such an angry expression on her face.

"Le, let go of it! Please!"

Neither of them seemed to believe that I would be able to wield that sword.

No, I mean it was wicked and suspicious-looking, but it was still a powerful weapon, and if we were able to make use of it, why shouldn't we? Why should we dispose of it? Was I the crazy one there?

Ellen, Eleris, and I were all so frustrated that we were about to burst.

* * *

In the end, I had no other choice but to let go of the sword after we argued for a

while. I couldn't refute their reasoning that it might be dangerous if I was exposed to that thing for a longer period of time. Rather, it might be even more dangerous because my mind wasn't taken over right away.

Ellen rubbed her temples as if she was even more exhausted after she had to go against my stubbornness.

In conclusion, we decided not to dispose of it right away but to take it to Temple to see if the weapon could be considered safe.

Anyway, Eleris' actions and Ellen's sudden awakening to magic body strengthening…

And then my 'Sacred Spirit' could be added to the list of surprising turns. With that, the complex and difficult Als Point scouting mission ended in the complete resolution of the incident.

"Now, please explain."

Ellen silently looked at Eleris. She didn't even need to explain what she meant by that.

Why did you deceive us and pretend to be a low-ranking wizard up to this point?

The corners of Eleris's lips twitched. Her expression had turned into a completely bewildered one.

"Th-that's… It's just one of these things. R-role… playing…?"

She probably already prepared an excuse for everything, but she seemed to have some difficulty bringing it over her lips.

"…Roleplaying?"

"Well… A beginner wizard who just went on her first adventure… That's the concept."

"…What are you talking about?"

Ellen glared at Eleris as if trying to tell her to stop joking around. Role-playing?

"I-I'm actually… A dragon that came out to play a bit… That's it."

"…?"

I tended to tell Eleris almost everything I did in Temple. I also told her about my little Senior named Redina, who told me that she thought that she was a dragon. So I had asked Eleris if it was possible that she was a dragon that lost her memories. Eleris's answer had been negative.

But she decided to use that excuse.

I could have never imagined that she would pull something like that.

* * *

Eleris continued her explanation while stuttering.

"It's… I just wanted to try going on an adventure like all those humans and experience all sorts of things. If I showed you my skills… It wouldn't be a real adventure… Yeah. So… I hid my abilities… But that was an emergency just now. I thought you might be in danger if I continued to act. I had no other choice but to… Abandon my concept… Th-that's what happened…"

A Vampire Lord was claiming to be a dragon that came out to play.

Well, the truth was more troubling, I suppose.

It would be better if she really was a dragon.

"Th-that's why… I was looking for some nice people who would be easy to get along with rather than some high-ranking adventurers, as I said in St. Point… Reinhardt helped me when I was in trouble… So…"

"…"

She was looking for someone she could enjoy an adventure with rather than strong

ones because she was already strong enough to play around leisurely, so we were chosen.

That was the explanation she wanted to give.

“There are no such things as dragons.”

Ellen, of course, cut her off as soon as possible, trying to keep her from speaking any more nonsense.

“Wh-why are you saying that? I’m here…”

Looking at Eleris, who suddenly turned into a dragon roleplayer, I felt like I was about to lose my mind.

Was it a trend?

"A-and I’m a dragon, alright… Anyway, I saved you from a… very dangerous situation, right…? I just wanted to help you guys. That’s all…”

Anyway, I saved you, so just say thank you!

It was a complete mess.

“There is no evidence that beings such as dragons exist. Also, it’s been said that they can cast magic without casting.”

“Th-that’s a myth."

Eleris just sprouted more poor excuses. However, everything we knew about dragons was actually a myth. No one knew if they were true or false.

Eleris also doesn’t believe in dragons to begin with.

“Uh-uhmm… It’s a bit hard to show you my true appearance…”

Eleris suddenly closed her eyes and opened them again.

They were blood red. Her pupils also turned into vertical slits.

“These are Dragon Eyes… A characteristic of dragons.”

After she showed us those Dragon Eyes, Eleris closer her eyes again before opening them once more. Her eyes had returned to their original state.

I guess that was some kind of Illusion spell.

“…Really?"

“Yes, really…”

The stories about dragons had a major weak spot: there were many legends about what dragons were supposed to be like, but nothing was actually clear about what kind of existence a dragon really was.

It wasn’t even clear if they were actually winged lizards.

Even if someone were to ask you to prove that you’re a dragon, people didn’t even know anything about them, so there was no way one could prove something like that reliably.

There wasn’t any evidence if those were really Dragon Eyes or something else. No one had ever seen a dragon, after all.

So Eleris was using that random illusion as proof that she really was a dragon.

Maybe Ellen will fall for this because she doesn’t know anything…?

That was what she was probably thinking.

Ellen seemed to be deep in thought.

It was definitely too much to call Relya a low-ranking wizard. Her physical strength, her incredible accuracy with a slingshot, spells we needed that appeared at the exact right time. She had quite a lot of knowledge as well.

And that tremendous amount of magical power, enough to cast one high-ranking spell after the other without a break.

“…Dragons aside, I did suspect that you might not be human.”

It seemed that Ellen already had some doubts that Eleris might not have been human.

“Ah, is… Is that so?”

Ellen was only half-confident about her suspicions. However, she wanted to see whether Eleris held any hostility towards us or not.

It was a bit frustrating that she used her magic body strengthening to protect someone she didn’t need to protect.

Anyway, Ellen knew that Relya held no hostility towards us, no matter if she really believed that she was a dragon or not. Meanwhile, I had a hard time pretending to be all surprised.

Eleris was talking so much nonsense, I knew that it was utter bullshit, but I had to give responses like *‘I would have never imagined that it was something like that!’*

We gathered the zombie bodies and burned them all. The sword’s curse on them was gone, but we still did it just in case.

Once that was done with, I wrapped the cursed blade in something like bandages, sealing it completely, and then hung it on my back. I didn’t know if those countermeasures were sufficient enough, but if I didn’t do it, those two wouldn’t leave me alone.

No matter what I said, they absolutely didn’t want me to hold that sword because we wouldn’t know what might happen.

"By the way, let me have a look at your condition, Ellen. I heard you didn’t know how to use magic body strengthening before…”

Eleris remembered that Ellen coughed up blood not too long ago.

“Right. Are you sure you're okay?”

“…I don’t know. I feel a little dizzy.”

Ellen seemed to have realized that her condition wasn't all that good.

"Can I take a look?"

"…"

Ellen seemed a little reluctant, probably because she still found Eleris suspicious, but in the end, she allowed her to touch her body.

"Hmm… It seems like her magical power has been almost completely drained. Perhaps she overdid it a bit while using that skill."

She wasn't taught how to use the skill, so she just released too much power, which strained her body.

"I'll share my magical power with you."

A blue light flowed out of Eleris's body and into Ellen's body. After some time, her complexion had majorly improved.

"Do you feel better?"

"Yes."

"Still, I'm no expert in treating injuries like this. There's also a limit to divine power. When you get back to Temple, find someone who specializes in this and get the right treatment."

Injuries caused by magic body strengthening weren't something that could be treated with divine power.

I was aware of that, of course. Ludwig had a very hard time learning that skill, after all.

To heal those kinds of wounds, one had to find a specialist in these types of matters, for example, a person that is skilled in magic body strengthening.

And those types of people were in Temple.

"…Thank you."

She was a mysterious wizard who claimed to be a dragon.

Although Ellen was still uncomfortable around her, she seemed to have understood that Eleris was genuinely trying to help us. One could have said something like, “If you really wanted to help us, you could have just solved everything on your own.” but Ellen didn’t go that far.

Everything ended quite well anyway.

“Now that this is over with, let’s teleport away. I’ll do it. It’s a waste to use scrolls, after all, so don’t use them.”

Eleris said that we didn’t have to go back on foot now that her roleplaying was over.

“Hmm… Wait a minute."

“Do you still have business here?"

Ellen seemed somewhat overbearing. All the work was done.

So Als Point was safe.

“The treasures they secured are still left here.”

There were still many valuable treasures all over the place.

“I don’t think there’s any reason why we shouldn’t take them for ourselves, right?”

In other words, “Why were you trying to throw away such precious things? If we just left them there, the Adventurers Guild or some other party would take them away.”

CHAPTER 169

We collected the other treasures left behind at Als Point. There were small jewels and precious metals, but among all those riches, there were three things that we absolutely had to take with us: the three artifacts described in the log.

—The cursed sword and the earrings and bracelet they had said to be magical artifacts.

However, I couldn't find the bracelet anywhere, only the earrings. Through Eleris's appraisal, we were able to confirm that they weren't cursed objects.

"These earrings have Tranquility magic engraved on them."

"Tranquility?"

At my question, Eleris started to explain.

"It's a type of magic that puts its target's mind into a calm state. It's a mental spell that is used to calm someone who has been thrown into confusion."

The item's passive skill fulfilled the same function as a mind clearing pill or a tranquilizer. Was that really something good?

"…Is that a good option?"

Eleris nodded at Ellen's question.

"It certainly is. It's important to stay calm in times of crisis, right? It isn't easily made either. Of course, I don't need it, though."

"I don't need it either."

Ellen simply handed me the earrings.

In times of crisis and such, Ellen was able to stay a lot calmer than I, who had the skill 'Sacred Spirit'. She didn't need that kind of magical artifact.

However, I didn't really need this either because I had 'Sacred Spirit' playing that spell's role.

"Hmm… I could use or sell them."

I put the earrings in my backpack for the moment. No matter their uses, they were still very expensive items, so there would always be the option of selling them.

In addition to that, we were able to pack plenty of jewels and gold coins from the inn those bastards were supposed to be staying at.

I just took ownerless items with me, but I felt strangely guilty. I had found about 20 gold coins and some precious metals whose values were pretty hard to determine for me.

We decided to split it among us. However, it was pretty much impossible to split it cleanly into three parts because there were more precious metals around than money, but I decided to let that much go.

"You can have all the magical items. I don't need them."

Since Eleris was supposed to be a dragon, she wouldn't be greedy for such items, as per her setting. Of course, I took precious metals and other things I could turn into money.

"I'll prepare the Teleportation spell then."

It would take five days for us to return to St. Point normally. Eleris tried to shorten our travel time by using mass teleport.

"…It would be stranger if you weren't a dragon."

"Ah, ahaha… It'll take some time to cast, so how about you take a rest until then."

When she said that she could use the highest-ranking space magic, Ellen seemed to believe Eleris's claims that she was a dragon more and more.

We waited those thirty minutes it would take her to cast until she completed the spell.

“How did we even end up like this?”

I hadn’t had such optimistic expectations that the reconnaissance mission would only entail reconnaissance and nothing else.

However, I didn’t think we would end up solving the whole case.

Although Eleris supported us a lot, the two of us somehow ended up solving a pretty huge case.

“Don't keep this on you for too long. Let’s report the incident and leave it in Temple’s care.”

Ellen was staring at the cursed sword strapped to my back, probably still worried.

It was quite understandable why she was concerned.

* * *

After we returned to St. Point by using Teleport, we told the Adventurers Guild officer what went down at Als Point.

The administrator’s log we took from there was evidence enough.

"Zombies… And a cursed sword…”

As he processed the sequence of events, he realized that the situation was even worse than what he had imagined.

“By the way, not only did you take care of the horde of Zombies at Als Point but also that cursed sword, right?”

"Yes. We couldn’t avoid the fight.”

After entrusting that reconnaissance mission to us and returning after having solved the incident completely, the officer simply stared at us with astonishment. He glanced at the sword I had tied to my back, unable to hide his uneasy expression.

“Normally, it’s a rule to leave whatever the adventurer finds to them. However, the guild will take care of dangerous items for a certain price.”

He seemed to think that my possession of the cursed sword would lead to another dangerous situation, and he wasn't entirely wrong to think that. After all, that mess was created by adventurers who decided to recklessly mess with dangerous items.

Neither Ellen nor Eleris directly said that they thought that it would be even less desirable for the sword to be left in the guild like that.

"That's fine. We planned on taking it to Temple to get it analyzed."

"…Oh yeah, that's right."

Only then did that guy seem to recall us having Temple student IDs as well as the Imperial Crest.

"Although I've only ever heard rumors, but Temple sure is amazing… For children that young to… I would have never thought in my wildest dreams that you would end up solving such a big case."

He didn't know all the details, so he felt it was quite strange that we managed to deal with such a huge case on our own. He knew Temple was supposed to be an amazing place, but it just hit different when one witnessed its greatness in person. Of course, Eleris had supported us heavily, and we were quite different from ordinary Temple students, but we didn't really have to explain all that to him.

"The predicted risk level for this mission was supposed to be B, but it should suffice to say that it completely exceeded that level. We'll give you ten more gold coins in addition to the original then, so twenty gold coins in total. We may also pay you more based on the case analysis later on."

The Adventurers Guild was quite generous. The mission was actually more dangerous than predicted, and we did a lot more than what was requested, so they would reward us with a lot more money, and they might even pay us even more after they investigated the case more thoroughly.

"We can just send the money for you two directly to Temple… I'm aware that this wizard isn't a Temple student…"

"Could I just go to one of the Adventurers' Guild's branches to retrieve it?"

"Then we'll do that."

He stared at the three of us.

I didn't know what he was expecting of us, but those results definitely weren't within his expectations.

"All of you are supposed to be F-ranked adventurers, but due to this and the other case, your ranks might get updated."

We had only solved two cases, as he said, but just with that, we were able to immediately raise our adventurer rank. That was quite huge.

He filled out some kind of document that stated that we were to be given the discussed reward and then handed one out to each of us. It seemed like we would receive our reward if we handed in the paper at the Exian Outpost's Adventurers Guild.

"You did a great job. On behalf of the Adventurers Guild as well as many other adventurers, I want to thank you. We will do our best from the Guild's side as well."

Even though we were still pretty young, he faced us with respect apparent on his face. It felt quite strange.

Ellen looked at me.

Did we actually end up helping someone?

I thought we were just killing a ton of people, and what was worse, even after we killed them, we murdered them one more time after they came back as zombies.

In the end, we never found out how the Points beyond Als Point were faring. They might have already completely collapsed after getting attacked by hordes of zombies.

Ellen, who wanted to gain experience, gained exactly that. However, she didn't know if she should be happy about that. I didn't know yet either.

Ellen looked at me and spoke softly.

"Let's go back."

Anyway, with that, our short adventure came to an end.

* * *

It was already late, so we rested at St. Point.

The next day, we returned to the Exian Outpost and received our reward from the Adventurers Guild. We each received twenty gold coins, and our Adventurer Rank would be updated after their investigation. That and other things would be communicated through Temple.

It was then time to part from the wizard Relya, who claimed to be a dragon who came out to play around.

Eleris wished us farewell in front of Exian's Warp Gate. Looking at Eleris, Ellen posed a question.

What are you going to do now that we're leaving?"

"Hmm… I'm not sure. I might just wander around again… Or something like that. To be honest, this was quite an intense experience… so I think I might not want to continue this."

In the past, Eleris had told me that she was sick of killing others. I might have made Eleris suffer by telling her to protect us in case of an emergency.

Those thoughts suddenly surfaced in my mind.

"Although we only knew each other for a short time, I enjoyed being with you… Although I can't say that what we went through was that enjoyable…"

It was quite fruitful, but I couldn't say that the experiences we had were good. Killing people and mutilating corpses couldn't be seen as a good experience, after all.

"It was nice traveling with you. Really."

Ellen wasn't able to completely believe her until the very end, but she could see that Eleris was being sincere. She continued to look at Eleris.

After staring at her for a long time, Ellen finally opened her mouth.

"I still can’t believe what you told us, and I also don’t know just what you were trying to achieve with this.”

Ellen said that she couldn’t believe that Eleris was actually a dragon. However, she was convinced that she was some sort of other being.

She didn’t know why she acted the way she did.

However, Ellen still held her hand out.

"Still, thank you for traveling with us.”

“Ah…”

Eventually, Ellen seemed to have accepted that we were greatly helped by that mysterious wizard called Relya and thanked her. Eleris just looked blankly at Ellen’s outstretched hand.

Somehow, she seemed to be about to cry.

“…I hope we can travel together again someday. However, not in such a dangerous place. Somewhere a little more beautiful. We could go on a trip… and only look at the beautiful sides of the world.”

Eleris eyes were slightly red as she held Ellen’s hand.

"I hope so, too.”

Ellen, who had trouble dealing with people, was able to say such words.

I would call that a positive change that the journey had brought about.

Like that, we left Exian.

[The Quest has ended - Darkland Adventurer]

[Measuring Performance…]

[You did your best! Great job!]

[Reward: Randomly receive one of Ellen Artorius's attributes.]

[Attribute Acquired - 'Hero's blood'.]

Then, I suddenly acquired a completely unexpected reward.

* * *

Attribute: Hero's Blood

Description: Heroes are blessed with the potential to grow even more powerful than ordinary humans. Their growth limit is so tremendously high that it can't be compared to ordinary humans, and their growth rate never falls either.

Neither that Hero's Blood nor the Sacred Spirit I received from Olivia Lanze were attributes I had set up.

There were some things in the original story that couldn't be explained with just talents alone, like why Ellen Artorius continued to grow so rapidly, completely exceeding everyone else's growth limits.

That was probably why the probability of that setting was supplemented by the addition of the Hero's blood.

In the end, 'because she's the hero's younger sister' was made into a characteristic. Those weren't all of Ellen's traits, though, so she probably had other settings added to her as well. However, I had no way to determine her actual characteristics.

The characteristic dealt with one's growth limit and growth rate. Just because one trained every day didn't mean one would constantly grow at the same rate infinitely. After one reaches a certain level, one's growth rate would slow down until one reaches their limit.

After someone managed to gradually lower and lower their record time for running, it would be harder to get even lower, ending up with only 0.01-second differences. All growth had a certain limit and individual differences, after all. For some, their upper strength limit might be B or A rank; some might reach S-rank.

That characteristic tremendously raised that limit. If my original strength growth limit was supposed to be B rank, it would raise that limit to A+ or even S-rank.

While Sacred Spirit was also widely advantageous, Hero's blood would tremendously raise my potential, even if it wasn't to Ellen's extent.

Soon, I would need that characteristic more than any other talent. It was a trait that would allow me to transcend the limits that have been placed on me as an individual.

It was described that I would be rewarded based on my performance in the Darklands Quest, and surprisingly, those guys actually concluded that I tried my best that time.

For the first time after a long while, I received a satisfactory reward.

I never thought that there would come a moment where I was actually thankful to the system.

[HP: 8.1(C-)]

[Agility: 8.1(C-)]

[Dexterity: 9.5(C-)]

[Magic: 12.4(C+)]

[Stamina: 12.8(C+)]

[Demon Domination: D] (Arcdemon's unique ability) (Cannot be used in current state)

[Self-Suggestion: C]

[Swordsmanship: C]

Combat level assessment: B-

No matter how I looked at it, I couldn't deny that those real battles led me to reach the next level. The rank of my self-suggestion had risen by one rank, and my swordsmanship had also risen to C rank, thanks to my constant training. Even before my Darklands adventure, I was able to reach that rank.

Levels weren't everything, but they were still an indicator of one's strength.

Compared to my past efforts, that was a tremendous level rise, but in the end my overall assessment was still B-. There was still a long way to go.

Of course, I was already skilled enough to call it an achievement.

And I would have entered into the segment in which my growth rate was supposed to slow down. However, due to the Hero's Blood characteristic, that restriction was as good as gone.

My adventure had ended, and an unexpected reward had fallen into my lap.

However, I could not return with light steps because the memories I had to carry back with me could not be called happy.

CHAPTER 170

After returning to Temple, we handed back our equipment and consulted with Mr. Epinhauser.

"…It was a hasty decision. I shouldn't have let you go."

Even that calm and cold-hearted teacher Mr. Epinhauser showed signs of regret after hearing what we went through.

The two of us, mere students, went ahead and completely annihilated bandits and wandered around the lands tainted by that cursed sword before actually dealing with said sword.

The explanation about the wizard Relya was kept as short as possible. Ellen and I decided to hide her claims and abilities. Ellen was unable to understand Relya; however, she seemed to have a good opinion of her.

Even Temple didn't know what happened in Exian and about the workings of the current Darklands. There were many adventurers frequenting the place, so I thought things would be fine. I never expected that said adventurers would be one of the place's dangers.

Most people who'd never been to Exian would think like that.

Although Ellen was very careful of adventurers, she also witnessed a lot of things that were just too hard to believe.

If Temple knew the reality of the Darklands, they wouldn't have let us go there.

However, Temple did more than enough. They had tried to add Mr. Epinhauser to our party, after all, but we had refused, and they had even given us Teleport Scrolls so that we could escape if we ever encountered a crisis.

"And that would be the cursed sword, I presume?"

"Yes."

I laid the sword I had wrapped in bandages on the table. I told him not to touch it directly, just in case. Mr. Epinhauser was still staring at the cursed sword intently.

“You didn’t fall under its curse?”

“Yeah, I have some guesses as to why… Maybe I’m naturally resistant to these kinds of curses… Or something like that.”

Anyway…

I couldn’t explain it any further than that. A characteristic was a kind of state that a talent scanner wouldn’t be able to pick up.

“I see, I will inform the corresponding department of Temple to analyze it. Don’t worry, you’ll be informed if it’s too dangerous. Of course, it will still be yours. If Temple decides that it’s something you are allowed to use, I won’t interfere any further.”

If Temple determined that there wouldn’t be any safety issues, they would allow me to use the cursed sword or whatever it actually was.

Although it was quite an ominous object, it was clear that it housed some incredible powers.

“If you need therapy, please let me know.”

Mr. Epinhauser thought that it might be necessary because of all those terrible experiences I had been through.

Neither Ellen nor I decided to get therapy.

Mr. Epinhauser seemed almost surprised when he heard that Ellen managed to awaken magic body strengthening all on her own.

It was something universally thought to be impossible. It was quite interesting seeing his surprised expression. Of course, Ellen had undergone some treatment. Those kinds of injuries couldn’t be treated by an ordinary priest, after all.

Someone quite unexpected ended up giving her said treatment.

“It’s like letting a dragon loose in a narrow alleyway. Student Ellen.”

“…Yes?”

“Alright. It seems that you stumbled a little while taking your first steps. You took the first step, so it can be said you’re able to walk now.”

“…?”

“Now… Breath iiiiiiiin… Breath oooooout…”

"????”

“The energy of the universe… Try to feel iiiiit…”

It was the yoga master.

Or one might call him a hypnotist as well.

It was the magical power sensitivity teacher. He was the one who taught that class where we only slept and woke up when the class ended.

It seemed that he was unparalleled in the field of magical power control on the continent. One might call him a master. He didn't seem to be a swordmaster, but he just seemed to be THAT kind of master.

A master of masters.

A grandmaster or something.

Anyway, the Grand Yoga Master guy treated Ellen with something like qi healing.

Injuries caused by magic body strengthening weren’t really all that common to begin with. If one were to use martial arts terms, they would be like injuries left behind by qi deviation. If one never learned that technique, one could never get those kinds of injuries.

So there were even fewer people who could treat those wounds.

However, there was someone among Temple's staff that could completely heal them.

Anyway, I once again realized that the personnel at Temple was not to be trifled with.

"What about magic body strengthening?"

"Don't use it. It's too dangerous. When school starts, you'll receive one-on-one training."

In the face of that unprecedented situation, it seemed like the Grand Yoga Master decided to teach Ellen personally. It was akin to teaching a kid who casually played around with nuclear weapons in their free time how to use them properly.

Anyway, our adventure in the Darklands was then complete.

It hadn't been that long since I had left the Royal Class dorms, but it felt like I had finally returned home after an incredibly long time.

"…"

"…"

However, the view of Temple's dormitory seemed unfamiliar to both of us. It wasn't just because there were very few people around because we had vacations.

We didn't exchange any words.

Both of us felt great relief at having safely returned to our home, but something within us had changed.

Complicated emotions were swirling in my mind, but I couldn't quite put a finger on what they were. It was difficult to put into words.

Eventually, we both ended up in the lobby after we went into our rooms, unable to rest. It felt like we should talk because we had finished our mission or something, but we just sat next to each other without exchanging any words.

It was as if we had forgotten how to talk.

Only then did I realize something…

Both Ellen and I were completely exhausted. We didn't even have a moment to properly rest after we went through one difficult situation after the other.

So now that everything finally came to an end, we completely lost our vigor. Everything that had happened in the Darklands was just one terrible memory after the other.

I didn't want to put it into words.

Although the incidents were all resolved, all of them were horrible and absolutely terrible.

We had to wrap it up and move on, but I didn't seem to have the confidence to actually wrap it up with words.

Although we were forced to do it, it left some indelible scars and imprints in both our hearts.

Verbally confirming that fact might just hurt a lot more.

Ellen rested her head on my shoulder without saying a single word.

"…"

"…"

We stayed like that for a while, completely silent.

* * *

Although we returned from the Darklands, it was only natural that we resumed our training.

Three days had passed since we had returned to Temple.

We still had vacations.

"Let's go."

“Yes.”

Only a few people remained on campus. Except for us, the only one around was Adelia.

So we did our early morning exercises together. I was finally able to keep pace with Ellen with a little help from my supernatural powers.

Earlier that year, I would have been crawling after that much, but I was able to manage. That was the result of my hard work, my supernatural powers, and my cheat.

After a long workout session, we wet our throats with some water and sat down on a bench.

“…”

“…”

After returning from the Darklands, we had not a single conversation.

It wasn’t because I felt awkward.

I just couldn’t figure out what to say.

We hadn’t brought anything up regarding the Darklands ever since the consultation with Mr. Epinhauser.

Ellen was very talkative back in the Darklands. She had a lot of things to think about, a need to discuss things, and a lot of doubts.

However, after she returned to Temple, she spoke as little as possible again.

It was a bit different from Ellen actually returning back to her original state.

We never even tried to discuss what happened in the Darklands. It practically felt

like the topic was taboo.

However, neither of us could have a conversation about something different without bringing that up.

It was only natural that it was the only thing continuously swirling in my head.

But that talk would be about the people we killed, the ones that almost ended up killing us. Although it somehow ended, I couldn't help but feel that it had left some trauma. The people we killed, the zombies we fought.

I actually kept having nightmares.

I couldn't sleep at all because I kept remembering slaughtering those maggot-filled zombies in my dreams.

When I was over there, I had no nightmares whatsoever, but as soon as I had to process everything after I finally reached a safe place, all those thoughts kept rushing in.

—They blew through my head like a hurricane.

I decided not to think about it further, but apart from the guild, all those terrible images continued to flood my mind.

So we avoided talking about the Darklands, resulting in us making very little conversation.

Even after we returned, we were still together all the time, except when we were sleeping.

I didn't know what to say to her, so I just continued to train and train some more.

Do you want to eat some dinner? -Yes. Let's go train. -Yes.

That was all we talked about.

Of course, aside from becoming less talkative again, she was a bit different from before as well.

Ellen seemed to be a bit more open-minded towards me than before.

She would lean on me often, and she would even fall asleep on my lap after training, saying that she was tired.

It did feel nice that we seemed to have grown a bit closer…

However, it also felt rather strange because we seemed like a couple while not exchanging even a single word with each other.

* * *

A lot had happened, but only two weeks had passed since our vacations had started.

We were in the Darklands for only a week or so, and yet so many things happened that changed both Ellen and me forever.

Thinking that she had probably returned already, I went to Eleris's shop and found her sitting inside.

"Your Highness."

"Hmm."

Eleris had taken off her Relya disguise and returned to her true form.

"You went through a lot. I'm sorry."

"It's okay. Although it wasn't enjoyable… it was quite the meaningful experience."

Eleris smiled sadly.

"That child. As I expected… She's someone related to Ragan Artorius, right?"

"…His younger sister."

"Is that so?"

—The younger sister of the Artorius who had killed the demon king.

—The son of the Demon King who had killed Artorius.

Eleris seemed rather confused about whether our relationship would end up being an ill-fated one or not.

“She’s a good kid. Upright, strong, and good.”

Eleris quietly took my hand.

" With all my heart, I hope that your bond with that child won’t turn into a tragic one, your Highness.”

“…Yes.”

Although she had said that, her expression seemed as if she was watching a story coming to its end.

"You should never ever tell the others about this. Especially Sarkegaar.”

If Sarkegaar found out, he would do everything in his power to harm Ellen. Loyar wouldn’t put a finger on her if I told her to stand down.

No matter how strong the relationship between Ellen and me was, in the end, it was nothing more than a giant glass castle that would shatter no matter what with just a single truth coming to light.

“Contact Loyar.”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

“And give her this.”

I put my backpack in front of Eleris.

It was filled with jewelry and precious metals from the Darklands. I was going to sell them through the Thieves’ Guild.

I didn’t know how much all those things were worth, but they were definitely worth

more than a penny or two. I didn't only bring my part of the loot but Ellen's as well. She couldn't sell it herself. She obviously found it much too annoying to take care of that herself, regardless of whether she was able to do it or not.

Additionally, I also packed some for Eleris so she wouldn't have any financial problems for some time.

"Also, go look for that sunless semi-basement you said you wanted. I mean, what's the use of earning money if not to spend it, right?"

"C-can I really do that?"

Eleris was so thrilled to the point that she was shivering. She seemed happy just imagining what awaited her.

CHAPTER 171

We continued our training.

In the past, I had thought that my usual routine was quite boring, but over time, I felt like it was relaxing. Ellen, in particular, gradually managed to return to her usual self after always being on edge, doubting everything around her when we were in the Darklands. She was like a cat with its fur raised.

When I thought about it, it almost seemed that Ellen was hissing at everything.

As I imagined that scene…

I thought that it might have been rather cute, actually.

Of course, Ellen technically seemed more cool than cute when we were in the Darklands.

She was very charismatic. Unlike how she usually was, she had talked a lot. However, every word she had said was nothing but the truth.

Anyway, although she acted a bit different from before, she was mostly back to how she originally was.

—Expressionless.

Ellen's vulnerable appearance I had seen in the Darklands was a stark contrast to her usual self.

After returning to Temple's safe environment, Ellen was also returning to her original self.

Of course, we weren't able to have a proper conversation as usual. We only trained together in the morning and at the gym. However, it felt more like we were simply working with each other.

—It wasn't because we were awkward with each other.

We just had no idea what we could say to each other, so we only had some short word exchanges. Originally, we had conversations with me joking or arguing where Ellen would respond with sarcasm, sometimes even going along with my words.

The words just weren't coming out.

Even when we went to eat at night, I just made it myself, and Ellen just quietly ate it.

It wasn't like we suddenly became uncomfortable around each other; it was quite the opposite, that girl definitely became a lot more comfortable with me.

However, only the topics I didn't want to bring up kept spinning in my head, so no words left my mouth.

As such…

At the time we usually had lunch…

There were only three students of Year One Class A remaining at Temple around that time.

—Ellen, Adelia, and I.

Adelia seemed to have been so worried about us that she almost started to cry when we came back. Of course, I was still suffering quite a bit, and so was Ellen.

We didn't tell her what happened in the Darklands, though.

All we could tell her was that the protection bracelet she made for us was a great help. Actually, the first time, when we managed to cut off Snoton's hands, Ellen activated its enchantment, blocked the sword, and so on.

I hadn't used mine yet, so I was still wearing it.

"Uhm… Are you really not going to tell me what happened?"

Seeing Adelia pose such a question, it was apparent that she didn't believe us when we told her that nothing much had happened.

"I said nothing happened though?"

"Ye-yeah! I-I'm sorry! I-I shouldn't have asked…"

She was startled and almost speechless at my rather sharp response.

No, I wasn't angry. Why did she always treat me like I was angry all the time?

I was really getting mad, you know?

Ah…

That was why.

"…"

Of course, Ellen just sat there eating her food quietly, her eyes underlined with dark circles.

She probably didn't get any proper sleep.

* * *

-Bang!

"Keuk!"

I jumped back and rolled over the gym's floor a few times before I finally spoke up.

"Hey… Do you want to kill me?"

"…I made a mistake. Sorry."

Regardless of what happened to us, we were still sparing in the training room like we used to.

That girl. She was a lot rougher than usual.

Ellen took her training sword and pointed it at me.

“Let’s do it one more time.”

“…”

Ellen ran towards me and struck my sword. Rather than fully blocking the sword, I tried to avoid it by turning sideways and aiming at the nape of her neck.

-Thud!

“Ugh!”

However, as soon as I side-stepped, she kicked my leg as if she had already expected it.

-Bam!

I eventually lost my balance and fell, followed by her pointing her sword at me on the ground.

“So… Were you trying to break them…?”

She didn’t just simply trip me; she actually full-on kicked my ankles. It was quite hard to even get up properly like that.

“…”

Ellen looked down at me before grabbing my hand to lift me up.

My skill level couldn’t even be compared to before. However, even after using my supernatural powers to strengthen my body, I still couldn’t reach Ellen at all, even if she didn’t use magic body strengthening.

While I got stronger, that girl also kept on getting stronger. The more I took steps to close the gap between us, the further ahead she walked—maybe to an even greater extent.

I just kept on getting beaten up by her, but as I kept getting beat up like that, I actually started improving a lot without even realizing it.

“Again.”

Ellen raised her sword again and stabbed it towards me.

-*Kaang!*

However, that time, she didn’t push my sword away but just hit the blade of my sword as she was stabbing forward.

“Kuhk!”

I didn’t let go of my weapon like I had used to do. However, the sword got pushed aside quite easily, leaving my chest wide open. Ellen knocked away my sword while simultaneously stabbing her training sword into my stomach.

-*Bam!*

“Urg!"

“!”

The blunt tip of the training sword was strongly stabbed into my abdomen, so I was forced to sit down on the floor.

I had tried to stop that blow, but I couldn’t.

“Are you okay? I’m sorry…”

Ellen sat down in front of me, not hesitating to check on my condition. She seemed a little flustered.

“Hey… Can it be that you… Have trouble controlling your power…?”

She looked extremely tired with big circles under her eyes.

If someone was so exhausted and tired, they should be easier to defeat, but Ellen was actually just fighting a lot rougher than usual because she couldn’t focus on controlling her strength at all.

If we went on like that, she might have accidentally ended up beating me to death.

"…"

"Let's call it a day."

"…Yes. Sorry. It's my fault."

"Don't say that. Stuff like this happens."

"…"

I slowly got up while staggering. Usually, I would just take a short break, but that day I would have to go see the priest on duty. 'At this rate, I might get permanently hospitalized.'

* * *

Ellen stared blankly at the training room door through which Reinhardt left.

She couldn't sleep well, so she would sleep five to six times a day.

Ellen had a good memory.

Every time before she went to sleep, she thought of the faces of the people she had killed. She also remembered the horrifying appearance of the zombies and the way guts and flesh splattered around as she slaughtered them.

Once she was affected by those terrible memories, those horrific images would appear in her dreams as well if she just went to sleep like that.

She couldn't sleep well at all.

The faces of the people she killed, the horrifying zombies that rose from the dead—when those things appeared in her dreams, she would always wake up covered in sweat.

It should be the same for Reinhardt as well.

She didn't want to keep having those nightmares.

She didn't want to fall asleep to those horrifying images haunting her.

It wasn't like that when she was in the Darklands. In fact, she didn't have any nightmares while she was there.

Ellen knew that she hadn't been able to have any long conversations with Reinhardt recently.

Their conversations were more like a question-and-answer game than an actual conversation.

They only had short exchanges of words that immediately ended—those weren't conversations. She just wanted to say something, but she couldn't even ask him what he was worried about because she didn't want to talk about those things herself.

However, even before that…

Ellen became aware of a more fundamental problem.

It wasn't because she had changed that their conversations had let up.

Reinhardt, who always took the initiative in striking up conversations, also talked less.

Ellen had always been silent—she was like that before as well. No matter if her mind was in disorder or not, she had always been silent.

The reason why there were no conversations between them anymore at the moment was because Reinhardt was unable to start proper conversations with her.

'He… He… had always been the one to start our conversations.'

Reinhardt was always the one to strike up conversations with her. Everything between them started with Reinhardt's words.

Her own answers had always been curt: yes or no. However, Reinhardt would continue their conversation despite her blunt answers. No matter what she said, the conversation would carry on. Reinhardt had continued to talk to her even if she didn't respond to his words.

Strange stories, rude words—he just said whatever.

Reinhardt would always continue the conversation. It was as if he was still waiting for her to answer him while persistently talking about this and that.

Reinhardt had grown silent, so their conversations had let up as well.

Ellen realized for the first time how passive she had been all that time. She then stood up from the training room floor after pondering for quite a while.

* * *

Ellen locked herself in her room and didn't come out. However, even without Ellen, I continued with my training on my own. I practiced my stance and swordsmanship while I was hitting a scarecrow—I had become quite accustomed to that already.

I had originally done my physical training alone in the first place.

That night.

After my evening training, I made some food for myself, even without Ellen around, and went to bed.

-Knock, knock

However, right when I planned on sleeping, someone knocked on my door. 'Just who could it be?' They didn't usually have something like a roll call in the dormitory, and since we had vacations at that moment, there shouldn't have been any patrols either.

'Is it Sarkegaar?' I thought that he might be able to pull off something like that because he had actually come to my room once while disguised as a maid.

However, when I opened the door, I found someone completely unexpected.

"…What are you doing here in the middle of the night?"

Ellen, wearing her pajamas, was standing right in front of me. Of course, we were told not to visit each other's rooms at night. However, we had vacations at the

moment, so the supervisors were a bit looser.

We were advised against it, but it wasn't anything noticeable.

Ellen didn’t even ask if she could come in and just strode into my room.

My room held nothing to be ashamed of, so I didn’t really care whether she came in or not.

However, what she did next was something I didn’t expect at all.

She lay down in my bed.

“…What are you doing?”

“I want to sleep here.”

“…Huh?”

My brain shut down for a second.

What was she saying? Did she lose her mind as an aftereffect of our Darklands travels?

Ellen glanced at me.

“I keep having nightmares these days.”

“…So?”

I could guess that she couldn’t sleep well because she had such dark circles under her eyes. I was the same.

But what did having nightmares have to do with sleeping in my room with me?

“I didn’t have nightmares when I was with you.”

—So she wanted to sleep with me.

That seemed to be the conclusion she reached.

“…Even if the teachers don’t patrol around much because we have vacations, that doesn’t mean they don’t do it, you know? What if we get caught?”

Ellen shook her head as she lay down on my pillow.

I didn’t tell her that she couldn’t do it, so I thought things were a little off as soon as I asked her what would happen if we’d get caught.

“Dunno.”

If we were to get caught, then we’d just get caught. So what? Yeah, the chances of us getting caught by a teacher were very low, but the chance was still there.

"And why didn’t you ask me first?”

“…We already did this once.”

We’d already slept together before, so why shouldn’t we do it one more time? Even if I tried to force her to leave, it was pretty obvious that things wouldn’t go my way.

No, I knew she became more comfortable with me and less hesitant, but that went too far! How could she just casually walk into a guy’s room and tell him she was going to sleep there?!

“…If someone catches us, I’ll just say you forced your way in and wouldn’t leave.”

“ Yes.”

As if things had been settled, Ellen covered herself with a blanket and prepared to go to sleep.

Just what the hell was going on there?! Did those things we were half-forced to do in the Darklands give Ellen some kind of immunity or something?!

We couldn’t just do the things we did in the Darklands at Temple.

Did her thought process change that much?

“Turn the lights off.”

-Flip!

Anyway, I turned off the lights, pushed Ellen towards the wall with my foot, and lay down. There wasn't just one pillow, so that didn't really matter, but there was only one blanket.

Ellen turned and stared at me.

Dim moonlight shone on her face.

Why was she looking at me?! What did that mean?!

"Do you… get nightmares?"

"…Yeah."

Although at that moment I felt like I'd be better off actually getting some nightmares.

Ellen looked at me quietly and then suddenly spoke up.

"I'm sorry."

"Why are you sorry about it all of a sudden?"

"Because I took you to a place… like that…"

She was gazing at me with sad eyes. All those terrible memories were terrorizing the both of us in the form of nightmares. Just going to the Darklands seemed like one bad memory, so she was sorry.

It'd already been a while since we came back. However, only in that strange situation was I able to bring up those things.

"It was me who wanted to go."

Ellen told me I shouldn't go there after I told her I wanted to go there. Rather, it was me who encouraged and dragged her along.

“If I hadn’t talked about my plans before… You wouldn’t have thought of going there either.”

However, she seemed to think that it was her fault I ended up going because she brought going to the Darklands up first.

“…Then let’s just say that we are both at fault here.”

“…Okay.”

I had gone there ready to take on whatever was awaiting me, and so had Ellen. What happened there was beyond our expectations, but we didn’t go there expecting rainbows and sunshine anyway.

I had decided to go through it and experienced such things, so the only thing left to do was overcome our trauma.

“I… I’ve been thinking.”

Ellen still seemed to have something to say.

“About what?”

“We’re… not really talking with each other these days.”

It seemed that Ellen was also concerned about the fact that we weren’t able to hold proper conversations.

“It’s been hard since you didn't say anything. I wanted to talk. I wanted to sort this out somehow, but you didn’t say anything, I didn’t… That’s what I was thinking… So I realized something.”

“…”

There was guilt in Ellen’s eyes.

"It’s… It has always been you who talked to me first.”

When I thought about it, I guess I always had. I always spoke to Ellen first. Whether it was about going to eat, train, argue or simply chat, I was always the one who spoke first.

Not every conversation we had was like that, but most of the time, it was me who started them. Even if Ellen only gave me short answers, I would continue to talk, no matter what.

Ellen was a quiet person to begin with, and she wasn't someone to strike up a conversation on her own. So the answers she gave were always curt, even before it was quite difficult to continue a conversation with her for long.

Ellen was thinking about the fact that I wasn't talking to her as much anymore. That was when she realized that she always waited for someone else to start a conversation without her even trying to put any effort into it.

Ellen held my hand, still covered with the blanket.

"I'm sorry. Reinhardt. Up until now… I haven't even tried to do anything."

So Ellen came to visit me in the middle of the night.

She wanted to be the one who started talking to me first that time, quite unlike her.

"…What do you have to be sorry for? I like to talk, and you didn't react to every little thing I did, so it felt really comfortable.

I wasn't trying to act cool—that was the truth. Ellen didn't care about those rumors regarding me that were floating around our class. She didn't care about my shitty reputation at all. Those things didn't interest her, after all.

No matter what I said, her reaction was always quite dull, so it was easy to be around her.

Ellen had always been passive, so I didn't have to put much effort into anything either. I usually spouted a lot of stupid bullshit, after all.

—A silent person and someone who was always talking about something.

Our personalities just happened to complement each other quite well.

Ellen smiled at my words.

It was quite painful seeing Ellen smile like that under the moonlight.

It was keeping me from sleeping. Ellen just slowly closed her eyes while holding my hand.

“Good night.”

Yeah.

I didn’t think I would have any nightmares that night.

I had to worry whether I would be able to sleep like that first.

* * *

The next day.

-Bam!

“Huh! Wh-what!”

I woke up because of a sudden pain in my head.

“…”

When I woke up, I saw Ellen, whose hair was completely disheveled, looking at me with half-closed, cold eyes.

“What the fuck are you doing?! Why the fuck are you hitting the head of a sleeping person all of a sudden?!”

“…Don’t touch weird places.”

“…D-did I?”

“Yes.”

“Wha-what did I touch?!”

“…Want me to tell you?"

“…No.”

I couldn’t respond properly under Ellen’s infinitely cold gaze.

I, once again, had no other choice but to shut up because if I said anything wrong, I would be beaten black and blue.

CHAPTER 172

Anyway, I woke up at the same time as usual at dawn. We woke up early for our morning training every day, so our bodies seemed to naturally wake up around that time. Ellen changed her clothes in her own room and met me at the dorm's front door.

"Let's go."

"Yes."

We didn't have proper conversations up until then, but Ellen had tried to initiate a conversation with me for the first time the day prior, so things seemed to have worked out somehow.

We didn't really have any feelings for each other, but I felt a strange feeling of relief for some reason.

However, there still wasn't much of a difference from before. We chatted while we jogged.

"Did you have any nightmares last night?"

" No."

Looking at her face, her eyes seem less tired than before.

"I had a dream. It wasn't a nightmare."

Ellen didn't tell me what she dreamed of.

"You?"

Perhaps it was because she had been thinking about the fact that she always gave short answers and never tried to continue our conversations, but Ellen was even able to ask some questions to her conversation partner.

Was she trying to change?

She didn't have to do that.

"I didn't have any nightmares either."

Before, I would have tossed and turned multiple times before barely falling asleep. I was so tired I didn't even have any dreams.

Did she think that I could just casually fall asleep with her next to me? It didn't matter how old she was, but wasn't that a bit problematic?

It was more than clear that Ellen Artorius was not feeling flustered in the least.

Anyway, there was a question occupying my mind.

"You're not planning on sleeping in my room today as well, are you?"

"If you don't like that, you can just come to my room."

"Why the hell would I do that?"

"If you're worried about the teachers, we are having vacations, so we could just sleep somewhere outside. We have a lot of money, after all."

"Why is this conversation going in that direction?"

Why was she giving suggestions as if it was already a given that we would share the same bed? Did she not know the concept of men and women? Of course, I knew she felt very comfortable around me.

Did I have to get 'Self-Control' as my next talent?

Ellen didn't seem to have any intention of listening to me.

* * *

After our training, we sat down on a bench to rest.

“Anyway, let’s just do this until the vacations are over.”

“Yes.”

After we returned from the Darklands, Ellen, who obviously suffered much worse from nightmares than me, became stranger and stranger.

Anyway, I wasn’t quite sure why, but it seemed like she wouldn’t get nightmares when she slept next to me, so I couldn’t really refuse when she asked me to stay with her until her nightmares let up. It was also an opportunity to train my mental strength.

“And as you should know, I’m a very gentlemanly guy. Ya hear?”

“…?”

This is…

Hey!

Did she not know how great I was? My second life was built on excruciating effort so that I could be considered a member of the general public!

“Don’t ever do this with anyone else.”

Ellen stared at me after I said that.

“…”

She seemed a little confused about what I was trying to say. ‘Did I offend her by what I said just now? Was I talking a bit too carelessly? Should I apologize?’

Ellen thought for some time and then opened her mouth cautiously.

“A while ago, before I went to the Darklands… The gray-haired aunty asked me something.”

“…Did she?"

“Yes.”

Loyar's nickname was Irene's Wild Dog, and no one knew her name except for me, Eleris, and Sarkegaar.

That was why the gang members called her Big Sis, other people called her Irene's Wild Dog, and Ellen called her gray-haired aunty. Whenever that happened, she would get beaten black and blue. However, it seemed like Ellen was aiming for that.

So Loyar had asked Ellen something?

"She asked me if I could die for you."

Why did Loyar ask her something like that? She thought Ellen was incredibly dangerous, so she might have asked her that as a way to realize the instructions of not hurting Ellen I gave her.

"I… said that I didn't know back then. I wouldn't know something like that unless I was put in an actual situation where I had to."

Ellen fiddled with her water bottle. She seemed like she was pondering something.

Could one die for someone?

One might be willing to protect someone in situations where one wouldn't die.

However, things might be different in an emergency where one might actually die. One had to be put in that kind of situation first before one could know how they might act.

So that was why Ellen said she didn't know. She was never in a situation like that before, after all.

However, the answer "I don't know" wasn't the same as saying she couldn't die for me.

Ellen and I had been to the Darklands as well. She had also experienced taking someone's life at the risk of her own.

Ellen spoke without looking at me, fiddling with her bottle.

“I… think I can die for you.”

“…”

Ellen seemed convinced that she could die for me. I didn’t know whether she came to that conclusion when fighting with me in the Darklands or after we returned.

After finishing what she had to say, Ellen looked at me.

“You… You aren’t just anyone to me.”

Okay.

I then knew what she thought of me.

However, it was then that what Eleris had told me came to my mind. No, I was already aware of it, even if Eleris hadn’t told me.

The truth would much too easily destroy our relationship, and I never thought that my lie would last forever.

We weren’t in danger anymore. No, we had always been in grave danger already.

Ellen Artorius and I.

We might end up in a much worse state than anyone else.

Someday. That could be the case.

“…I’m sorry.”

I’m sorry.

I apologized for speaking such reckless words, but that wasn’t the only thing I felt sorry for.

“And…”

“Yes?”

-*Pak!*

“!”

I flicked Ellen’s forehead.

“D’ya really want to die so unluckily?”

"???"

Ellen’s eyes widened as she couldn’t understand why I had flicked her.

“Just shut up, and let’s go eat."

Ellen ignored me as if she had nothing to do with me, pouting all day.

* * *

—The Imperial Palace, Emperatos, located in the Imperial Capital, Gradium.

—Inside the Palace.

Originally, it was the Empress's residence, but after her death, the place naturally became the living space of the Imperial Princess.

It was in the exact opposite area where the Imperial Prince resided, so the Prince and Princess rarely met each other unless it was for an official agenda in a common area in the Imperial Castle.

There was no threat of assassination, as multiple safety measures had been implemented, including tight security and protection. Even if such measures weren’t in place, the Prince and Princess had never made any attempts to assassinate each other like that before.

Anyway, everyone inside the Palace was under the control of the Princess.

No one would dare to leak any secrets discussed there.

And inside the bedroom of said Imperial Palace, where the Imperial Princess resided…

There, Charlotte sat on a rocking chair, not in a dress but in her casual clothes. Almost no light came into the room because of the blackout curtains she had placed in her rather dark room.

The room looked as if it was night, even though it was midday.

Someone was kneeling in front of Charlotte.

"…Your Highness. You… You have to accept it."

"…We decided not to talk about this anymore, didn't we?"

The man bowed his head even further at the sound of the Princess' quiet voice.

"Your Highness, I have put all the information I could find together. I searched all over the continent for personal accounts and information. I've been double-checking, triple-checking, quadruple-checking. I've looked over your command over and over in case I might have missed something, but the results were always the same."

"…"

The man was close to banging his head on the ground.

"The total number of people kidnapped was seven. There was no boy who was even close to his appearance and age group among them. That's a fact."

"Dyrus."

"The boy wasn't kidnapped! You already know as much!"

"Dyrus."

"He was much too healthy to be someone who got kidnapped and held captive for

such a long time! He didn't show any signs of starvation. The chances of him being someone who got kidnapped recently, as Your Highness said, are very slim!"

—Dyrus.

After making some brilliant contributions along with the unidentified boy in the Princess' escape from the Demon King's Castle, he had become Charlotte's escort knight.

After organizing his thoughts, it became obvious to him that it was just too suspicious.

Unlike Charlotte, who was just skin and bones when he saw her, the boy had looked far from that. He had found the magic scrolls straight away. The demons had even moved to help that boy.

And he had purposely ran away…

He had already obtained the complete list of kidnapped people, but none of the people described were in any way similar to that boy.

However, no matter how often he explained that, it was no use. He told Charlotte countless times that the boy was strange and that he should be properly investigated, but she never gave him the order.

"Dyrus. Are you done talking?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

Dyrus raised his head quietly and looked at Charlotte.

"What difference does it make?"

"…What?"

"What difference does it make if he's suspicious?"

Charlotte spoke in a quiet, powerless voice while still looking at Dyrus.

"He could have escaped on his own as soon as he found the teleport scroll. However,

he came back to the garrison to save me, and he somehow managed to do it."

"…"

"Dyrus, no matter how often you tell me such things, it won't change anything. Even if the boy is suspicious and we aren't able to identify him. It's all useless. It doesn't make the slightest difference."

"…"

"It would never change the fact that he risked his life to save me. It also doesn't change the fact that he didn't even ask for anything in return for saving me."

There were so many suspicious circumstances surrounding him, but it wouldn't change anything.

The boy had risked his own life to save hers. Although he was surrounded by various lies, that fact was the truth. Charlotte leaned her body against the backrest of the rocking chair, slightly making it rock.

"My order will stay the same."

A ray of light entered the room, flashing across Charlotte's face.

"Don't investigate the boy anymore."

Every time light shone on Charlotte's face, her eyes lit up for but a moment.

Charlotte's eyes, which became visible for a moment, didn't shine with their usual golden luster, but were dyed in black darkness, seeming like an endless void.

It was such a deep and dark color that they felt like they led to a limitless abyss.

"Your Highness. He might be the only one who knows how to cure Your Highness' condition, even if the chance is low."

"I said it before…"

Charlotte's black eyes gleamed grimly.

“I don’t want to put his life in danger after he has given me the chance to live just a bit longer.”

A glimmer of hope.

That was why Dyrus had tried to find the boy so desperately, however the Princess refused that. She felt no need to bring him out into the world as long as she knew that he was in a safe place.

—A certain wizard’s Scroll Shop.

Charlotte and Reinhardt were the only ones in the world who knew that the place was connected to that boy.

Charlotte didn’t tell that information to any of her people.

“I’m tired. Leave.”

“…Yes, Your Highness.”

After Dyrus left, Charlotte stared blankly at the ceiling.

'Just… who are you?'

There were a lot of things she didn’t want to accept. However, with each passing day, she grew warier, so she gradually came to accept some of the facts.

'Are you… really my enemy?’

Charlotte took several deep breaths, covering her eyes with her right hand.

“Haaaaaah…”

When she removed her hand, Charlotte’s eyes were back to her usual golden color.

'Is this cruel?'

'Wh-why are… Why are you doing this to me? Why me? What are you trying to do to

me?'

'Do you think this is cruel?'

'Don't! Don't do this! Stop!'

'This is a war between species. It's a fight that started with the annihilation of the other as a goal.'

'Don't touch me! Leave! Leave me alone!'

'So there's no reason for us not to have some insurance just in case.'

'Uuhurk! Urg! Hurrrg! Kyaaaaaark!'

Charlotte's body trembled slightly as she closed her eyes—it almost seemed as if she was convulsing.

She remembered absolutely terrible memories.

-Gorge! Bite!

'U-u-uwa… Uwaaaaaaark!'

'U-uhuurk! Uwaark! Uwaaaaaaarg!'

When she had seen humans eating each other, her bonds of reason had been broken.

Seeing those who had forsaken their dignity, those whose dignity had been forever lost…

Watching people ripping off the flesh of corpses and even trying to eat the living with no rhyme or reason.

And seeing her mother, who had fed on someone else's flesh like a hungry ghost.

All of it had made Charlotte lose all reason.

She knew…

She already knew…

She already knew all those things, even if Dyrus didn't say anything.

She just didn't want to accept it. That kid's presence was the only form of hope she had. So all those words were just unacceptable to her.

'Sob, hurk… Sob… '

'C-calm down… '

She just wanted to believe that the boy who had been kidnapped like her had somehow survived.

She knew in her head that it was unlikely, but her heart just couldn't accept that.

However, she had to accept it. There was so much evidence, so many truths she had no other choice but to accept.

'Hu-urg! Wh-wh… Who. Who are you… How…?'

'N-no! I mean, I was trapped in here as well!'

But how could there have been any survivors?

She had been startled by the boy's presence. With that, she seemed to have

confirmed that she hadn't lost all her reason and killed everyone.

She even felt a certain sense of joy.

So she didn't doubt anything.

However, she had to accept the simple truth that no one could have survived in that situation.

—That boy wasn't a survivor.

She already knew that there were several suspicious points about him in the countless moments that passed by in the blink of an eye.

The boy… he didn't know she was locked up there.

He was completely unaware of the gruesome and horrific massacre that left that scene.

That was why she tried to only focus on the most important facts.

—He had saved her life while risking his own.

She just wanted to remember that one absolute truth.

"…"

Tears slipped through Charlotte's closed eyelids.

* * *

Nothing had changed since then. We still had few conversations, but we did both exercise and spar together.

The only thing unusual was that Ellen started sleeping in my room, completely abandoning her own room. However, humans were very adaptive animals.

After a few days of doing that, I didn't really mind it anymore.

Ellen told me she would leave Temple to go visit Loyar, she she came back in the

middle of the night that day after she had obviously gotten beaten up by Loyar.

Time passed, and our vacations were coming to an end.

Ellen, Adelia, and I packed our bags and left Temple.

Liana de Grantz, wearing casual clothes, was waiting for us at the entrance.

“You’re just in time."

We were going to her villa on the Edina islands to play before our summer vacations would finally come to an end.

CHAPTER 173

Although we were given priority to use the Gates by utilizing the Imperial Crest, through the power and prestige of Duke Grantz, we were granted the same right to use the Gates first. We would head to the southernmost part of the continent using super-large Warp Gates.

“What about Harriet?”

“She said she would go ahead and wait for us. Heinrich will be there too.” Liana answered my question.

A total of six people would go to Duke Grantz’s villa on the Edina Islands to hang out.

—Ellen, Liana, Adelia, Harriet, and me.

…As well as Heinrich von Schwarz.

Liana had said she would just relax for her vacation, and she probably did just that. Liana’s Electrokinesis was growing stronger at a fast pace. Even if she didn’t put in that much effort, she just got stronger and stronger.

Ellen still put a lot of effort into her training, but Liana did no such thing.

She just had that kind of talent.

“How were the Darklands?” Liana asked, as she seemed most interested in our visit to the Darklands.

“Well, it wasn’t anything worth mentioning."

“…Yes. That’s right."

Ellen nodded in agreement with my words.

We didn't want to talk about what happened in the Darklands. It wasn't anything pleasant, and it wasn't something that would be comfortable knowing.

—A massacred village, a gang of bandits, a hoard of zombies, a cursed sword.

What we had been through was much too terrifying to be anything to brag about.

"Hmm, by the way, you…"

Liana alternated between looking at me and Ellen and then gave a slight nod and tilted her head.

"The atmosphere around you two seems a bit different."

Something had changed, but it was rather hard to pin down—that was what Liana seemed to think. We didn't say much about our trip, and Liana didn't seem to be that curious either.

* * *

We headed south via Warp Gates and then teleported to the Edina Islands by one of the Grantz Family's wizards.

Mass Teleportation could move all of us immediately, but it was a lot of ranks above Teleport, so the wizard just casted Teleport on us one after the other to transport us to the villa.

There was a pub run by the Succubus Queen Airi on the Edina Islands, but there was no reason for me to go there. I did want to see what they were up to with my own eyes, but I didn't have time to do that.

Like before, we passed through several super-large Gates to reach the shore where the wizard would be waiting.

"Ellen! Liana! Adelia!"

Harriet, who arrived before us and was waiting, ran towards us. Heinrich von Schwarz, who stood around a little awkwardly, also approached us.

“You’re safe, Ellen!”

“Yes.”

“That’s a relief. I was so worried.”

“Thank you.”

Harriet nodded, saying that she was glad that Ellen was safe.

“Wasn’t it dangerous?”

“No. I wasn’t much."

Our lives were just on the line several times, but I didn’t say that. Harriet looked at me after she greeted everyone.

Then it was time for her to greet me. She’d probably say something like, “Why’d you come back?”

“…I’m glad you’re safe, Reinhardt."

“…Huh. Yeah.”

I didn’t think she would say something like that with such a bright smile, so I felt a little embarrassed.

She looked so happy that I couldn’t even say anything more.

* * *

We teleported to the villa one after the other; I was the last one. Like that, we crossed the great ocean to the southern islands.

“Wow…”

The others who had arrived before me were admiring the scenery before they even

went to unpack their luggage. The mansion was standing before a privately owned beach with no people around.

The scenery of the uninhabited island we were on before was also good, but it was much too humid.

However, the new place's humidity was very low, and it had such a clear view that it seemed like the sky merged with the sea.

Ellen stared quietly at the scenery.

A servant that came out of the villa took our luggage. After we spent our last week there and returned to Temple, our second semester would start.

"Our wizard is rather busy, so he went back already. Like it or not, you guys have to stay here for a week."

Of course, the wizard who transported us there didn't seem to have the leisure time to play around. He went back to his original job after transporting all of us.

In other words, we couldn't go back just because we got sick of the place. However, there was no real need to go back, in my opinion.

That would be our first and last real break during our summer vacation for Ellen and me, as we had been moving about and fighting all the time, and even after we had returned to Temple, we had just resumed our training.

"Let's get something to eat first."

Liana dragged us into the villa, telling us that although we came to play around, we should first grab something to eat.

"Wh-what's all this…?"

Adelia and I were startled by the splendidly prepared food.

Harriet, a noble, Heinrich, someone of a royal family, and the young lady owning the villa, the young Duchess of Grantz, didn't seem particularly impressed.

"…"

And Ellen…

It seemed like her eyes were even more attracted to all the food laid out before her than the vast and beautiful ocean view she had just seen.

"I don't really care about formalities. Eat as much as you want, however you want. If it's not enough, just tell me."

Liana declared it as if to tell us that we could just forget table manners and such, so even those who weren't familiar with table manners could sit down and eat comfortably.

Of course, I started eating as Ellen started shoving the food into her mouth.

To be honest, I also tended to eat a lot compared to others, although the amount Ellen would stuff into herself was just too much.

If one were to use a metaphor, Ellen's appetite was in the realm of Gods, and mine was the strongest among humans.

* * *

Liana said that we were in a suburb of Rajak, the main port city of the Edina Islands. Airi also opened her pub in Rajak as well.

However, that city seemed to be something like the capital of the Edina Islands, so I wouldn't be able to find her even if I wanted to.

"If you get sick of the beach, you can just go to Rajak to play around. Of course, you can't go alone or you'll get lost."

Liana told us to just relax and do whatever we felt like doing. Rather than touring around together, it seemed more like she was letting her friends rest in the same villa she happened to be at.

"…Did you have a good trip?"

Heinrich talked to me during our meal.

“Ah, kinda.”

I didn’t have that good of a first impression of that guy. He had picked a fight with me for being someone with no supernatural power crawling his way into the class and got beaten up. After that, he had avoided me because he thought I actually was the son of some huge bigshot, but when he found out I was just a beggar, he ignored me completely.

Since then, we hadn’t really met each other—other than that one time on the deserted island when he was all nervous.

However, that situation…

All of the others, except us two, were girls, and that guy was attracted to Liana.

There was no way that the guy could talk comfortably, so even if he didn’t like me even a single bit, he tried to talk to me first.

“Did you see any demons or something like that?”

“…No. Nothing really happened.”

I just answered his questions vaguely. It really wasn’t something worth telling everyone.

“Then what did you do when you went there?”

“Just toured around. It wasn’t that dangerous.”

“…So you just wasted your time?”

Wasted our time…

That remark made me want to grab that bastard’s neck. Ellen, who was still eating, also seemed to flinch a little.

It was clear that he was being sarcastic.

We didn't waste time; we had gone through more terrible experiences than he could ever imagine.

I had no intentions of bragging childishly.

Wasting our time…

Maybe it would have been better if we actually had just wasted our time.

"…Maybe."

Heinrich seemed startled by my casual admission to his words.

* * *

If one thought of summer, one would inevitably think of the sea.

Going by the staple development of a romcom, we decided to go for a swim after lunch.

—So everyone changed into their swimsuits.

"…Are you doing this on purpose?"

"…?"

"What?"

At Liana's absurd remark, Ellen tilted her head and just answered bluntly.

"…Somehow, I knew the two of you would do this."

Harriet nodded, looking a little exasperated as if she had already expected Ellen and me to act like that.

"What?"

"Do you really have to wear the swimsuits provided by Temple, even here?"

Yeah…

Both Ellen and I wore swimsuits provided by Temple. All the others were wearing their private swimsuits.

Liana was in her tube top bikini, Harriet was wearing a bikini with a frilly skirt, and Adelia was wearing a modest, one-piece swimsuit.

Heinrich was also wearing swimming trunks.

Anyway, Ellen didn't really get why she should care about what swimsuit she was wearing, and I also just bought a Temple swimsuit with me because of similar reasons.

Liana didn't seem to mind about it that much, and Harriet seemed to have expected it to some extent.

"How are swimsuits important when you can't even swim?"

"…What?"

"Girl, as long as you can swim, how are swimsuits important? Aren't you nitpicking on something really petty?"

No…

I did know that swimsuits were a lot more important than being able to swim. Liana frowned at my questions.

"Ah, I haven't seen you in a while, and I already hate you."

Liana shook her head as if her hospitality had completely disappeared from her face, then she stared at me in my Temple swimsuit.

"…Ah… You're right. Swimsuits aren't that important."

She looked at Heinrich and me alternately. What? Why was she looking at us like that? It felt kinda bad.

"…"

For some reason, Heinrich suddenly put on his shirt.

Swimsuits weren't important…

I felt like I knew what she meant.

Adelia, and Harriet, of course, couldn't even look at me straight.

Obviously, Heinrich, someone who used pyrokinesis, didn't bother to exercise. I was also a supernatural power user, but I was still someone who fought in close-quarter combat.

Any swimsuit would look different depending on who was wearing them.

I had quite a well-built body.

"Wow, they must be as hard as rocks."

"Crazy woman! Wh-where are you touching?!"

Liana came up to me without an ounce of hesitation and touched my abdomen, so I jumped in surprise. 'What the hell is this?!'

"…Are you worn out?"

"That's not the problem here!"

"Just stay still. Try tightening them."

"Are you crazy? What's wrong with you?"

"Will you only stay fucking still after I knock you out? Do you want me to electrocute you?"

Liana de Grantz's level of self-indulgence was high enough to surprise even me. Harriet, Adelia, and Heinrich were watching the scene with puzzled expressions on their faces.

"You bastard, then I'll do the same!"

When I counterattacked, I found Liana wide open.

"Sure, go ahead. What are you gonna do?"

…I didn't expect her to react like that.

"So there are lines that even you don't cross? Isn't that unexpected?"

Liana covered her mouth as she laughed when she saw me standing there dumbfounded.

I could feel Heinrich's rather uncomfortable gaze on Liana and me.

* * *

Once that whole mess passed by, we went swimming. However, what we did was a little different from normal swimming.

Remembering the times when I swam in the sea with underwater breathing magic cast on me when we were on the uninhabited island, we all got that spell cast on us by Harriet and took a look around the underwater world.

Heinrich and Liana seemed surprised, as that was the first time that they had experienced it. Heinrich subtly showed that he wanted to go around with Liana, and she caught on to that, so she shoved him away underwater.

What an unsociable fellow she was.

Ellen and I usually went around to hunt back when we were on the island. Of course, the scenery we saw was different and similar at the same time.

Harriet dragged Adelia with her to show her around. It was the first time for her, after all.

Ellen just leisurely swam through the sea, occasionally meeting my eyes.

It somehow seemed that she wasn't really enjoying herself. When we were on the deserted island, she busily absorbed the scenery around her as long as she could, even saying it was fun.

I felt similarly.

We were still too distracted to concentrate on simply playing around with no care.

* * *

We swam all day long. That was only possible because Harriet kept on recasting her underwater breathing spell on us.

“I-I feel so tired…”

“Yeah…”

“Walking on the ground… Is so awkward…”

Everyone except Ellen and I suffered from extreme exhaustion. It was incredibly hard to move in the water all day long, even with underwater breathing magic cast on oneself. After everyone had changed into their clothes, they hung around in the mansion’s living room.

The dinner was just as sumptuous as lunch.

Since not all of us had been freed of exhaustion, we were each doing our own thing. There were enough rooms in the mansion for all of us to have our own.

After finally getting to take a break, Liana muttered dejectedly, saying that she went there to rest but almost ended up losing all her strength.

Resting was actually the most difficult thing to do, you punk.

* * *

I had nothing to do, so I went out on a nightly walk. My body felt a little sore, but I would soon be working hard again, except for the time I would spent there, so I decided I should rest properly during our last few days of vacation. I wanted to take the time to recover mentally as well.

“Hm?"

When I looked towards the beach, I could see flashes of fire in the darkness.

A flame that was about two feet high was burning on the sandy beach, and in front of

it stood Heinrich.

What was he doing over there?

Was he still training his supernatural power?

He sure was passionate about his training.

I didn't really want to pay him much attention, so I just passed by him and walked around the beach before I returned to the mansion.

Liana and Adelia had fallen asleep quite early, as they were insanely exhausted. Harriet was sitting across from Ellen in the lounge, chatting about this and that.

"…Why can't you tell me about it?

"I just… think that it's not something pleasant to hear."

"…"

However, the atmosphere around them didn't seem very lighthearted. Harriet looked at Ellen, then noticed me and talked to us both.

"You two, what happened to you two was certainly not nothing."

"…What are you talking about?"

"The Protective Bracelet. You told Adelia that it was very useful."

Ah.

Was she talking about that? Ellen had only said that she made good use of her bracelet, not for what she used it for.

However, when Harriet heard about that, she knew that we were most certainly put into a situation in which the bracelet could demonstrate its usefulness. Adelia also

guessed as much but didn't ask.

Harriet immediately asked Ellen what kind of danger we had put ourselves in, but Ellen remained silent. Harriet really seemed to want to know what kind of hardships we had been through.

I was still wearing it because I hadn't used it yet, but Ellen didn't.

"As Ellen said. It's not something pleasant."

"…"

What was the point of hearing our story?

Why did she want to know about how we killed people and slaughtered their reanimated corpses after? Harriet's expression changed.

She was clearly hurt.

She gave us those bracelets because she was clearly worried about us. However, we didn't want to tell her anything about what happened during our journey.

She couldn't help feeling frustrated and sad because she didn't know what the content of that recount would be.

I knew she wouldn't be able to treat Ellen and me the same way as before if she came to know about those things, so I couldn't tell her anything.

"…You guys treat me like a little kid."

After murmuring something we couldn't properly understand, she went off somewhere. Her Eyes met with Ellen's, who was still seated.

They were sad eyes.

"…"

"We…"

Ellen's voice was trembling. She simply couldn't tell others of her experiences that

might lead others to treat her with disgust or fear.

I could talk about those things except for some parts, but in the end, I felt the same about our struggle with the zombies.

“Did we… really waste our time…?”

No, what we did wasn’t a waste of time. We had definitely gotten something out of it.

If it was a complete waste of time, nothing would have changed.

“It wasn’t a waste of time. Absolutely not.”

If everything we did was just a waste of time…

If nothing had changed…

That might have been for the better.

However, we couldn’t just solve that problem in secret on our own.

But it could be overcome.

What we felt was just momentary confusion. I couldn’t help but stare at Ellen, who was looking out of the window with a gloomy expression on her face.

Harriet seemed hurt.

Unfortunately, that wound we made in her heart wasn’t something we could do anything about.

Did she feel like we bullied her?

No, she probably felt a lot worse than that.

CHAPTER 174

That night, we slept in our own rooms.

Ellen and I shared a bed in the dormitory those days. However, the other students were with us at that moment—Ellen didn't even try sleeping with me in that situation.

She didn't seem to have any nightmares anymore, but would she be able to sleep well on her own?

Thinking about those things, I found myself unable to sleep. The others seemed to have fallen asleep rather quickly because they were completely exhausted, but my stamina had become unnecessarily higher, so I didn't have much trouble playing around underwater all day.

If overworking one's body became a daily routine, one wouldn't get tired even if one overworked it a little bit, so I couldn't sleep.

In the end, I didn't manage to fall asleep, so I decided to leave the room and get some tea.

Since the servants slept in a different building, there were none around at that moment, so we were the only ones in the mansion.

"…What? Weren't you sleeping?"

"…I woke up."

Ellen was sitting absentmindedly on the terrace at the end of the second floor's hallway, so I approached her and asked her why she was there; that was her answer.

She had fallen asleep. I couldn't help but notice that her pajamas were slightly wet. She had experienced another nightmare and was sweating profusely.

I also had nightmares, but not to the point where I couldn't sleep as Ellen did. It seemed that Ellen was a lot more traumatized by our experience than I was.

“…”

“…”

I sat down on the chair next to Ellen, but we had nothing to say.

When it was just the two of us, it felt like things were getting better, but when I saw our classmates, I couldn’t help but realize it once more.

“Liana seemed to have improved her abilities a lot during our vacations.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah, she was acting like usual, but I heard she improved a lot.”

Ellen didn’t wait for me to talk to her first but took the initiative.

Ellen had obviously changed.

“Adelia’s magic crafting is still not there yet, but it seems like she’s able to do some basic permanent enchantments and magic artifacts.”

“Hmm… That's a fast improvement.”

As Adelia was stuck in Temple, all she did was study, but she spent her time to the fullest, so she was able to do a lot more things.

“Harriet seemed to have studied some destruction and support magic that can be used in practice.”

It looked like Harriet had studied a lot of practical magic during the vacation.

Judging by what I had seen on the beach, Heinrich’s ability also underwent some major improvements. Although what I saw wasn’t quite on the level of a bonfire yet.

Everyone had grown in their own way.

"Everyone worked hard."

“Yes. I think so too.”

Ellen stared out at the waves crashing on the shore. Everyone had grown in their own way.

“I think we were in too much of a hurry."

"I wish I had just tried to improve in a normal way. I wanted to be stronger, faster, just a little bit stronger… I think I made a big mistake.”

We had become stronger, that was for sure. Ellen dipped her foot into the realm of superhumans, and I had also seen some major improvements in my abilities.

We had made a lot of money, and I had acquired a powerful, albeit cursed, sword.

However, even if we had chosen normal ways to improve, we would have steadily become stronger.

We had gone through terrible things, and we had to lie or shut those up who were asking about them.

Those children lived their own lives during the vacations, and they grew in one way or another.

We might have made a mistake while trying to take a shortcut to become stronger just a bit faster.

In the end, we were even forced to hurt Harriet.

Ellen seemed to have felt a lot of different emotions when she saw her classmates growing step by step using different methods from us.

“Sigh…”

I took a deep breath. As someone who had gone through the same, I didn’t want to say it…

“Although what we experienced wasn’t positive, let’s try thinking positively.”

“Positive…?"

“Yeah, even though what we experienced was terrible, we can’t say that the results are bad.”

What Ellen needed was a cruel duality of things. I looked straight into Ellen’s eyes, who seemed a little confused.

“We saved more than we killed.”

“…”

“It was terrible, but definitely nothing we have to be ashamed of.”

At least 50 people would have died if it wasn’t for us. Although the experience was incredibly tough and terrible, it couldn’t ever be called worthless.

It seemed like Ellen was drowning herself in shame, thinking that our deeds were completely worthless.

“It might have been a mistake that we went to the Darklands, but we didn’t make any mistakes while we were there.”

We made the best choices we could while we were there. There was no reason to be hunted by shame and nightmares.

“…Is that so?”

“Yes.”

I nodded at Ellen’s question.

* * *

The next day.

We had a simple breakfast prepared by the servants.

"…What's with this atmosphere?"

Liana tilted her head as she seemed to sense the slightly strained atmosphere. Harriet's expression was noticeably sad, and Ellen didn't really seem to react much, but she did stop eating her food.

Harriet would usually just pout and go, "Hmpf!", she wasn't reacting like that, though. It was seriously hard to bear seeing her hurt.

When she was really sad, Harriet wouldn't get mad.

—She would just internalize her pain.

I came to know that fact all over again.

It was incredibly hard to look at.

"Anyway, I'm going to Rajak today, but if you want to come with, you can. If you don't want to, you can just rest here."

I didn't really know what she was planning. I thought that it would be more annoying to go with her, so I decided to stay behind and rest.

"Ellen, come with me."

"…?"

For some reason, Liana seemed to want to take Ellen with her.

"Looking at your swimsuit is just unpleasant. We'll go buy a new one. I'll pay."

It seemed to have bothered her a lot seeing Ellen play around at the beach in a Temple swimsuit.

No, was it really that unpleasant?

Well, how could I understand the likes and dislikes of a Duchy's young lady? Ellen didn't seem to have any objections.

No, but I also only brought a Temple swimsuit, you know? Why did she only want to

buy something for Ellen?

"Hey, what about me?"

“Wow, are you seriously asking me to buy you something with such confidence? How about no?”

“Ah, fine.”

Of course, I was only asking to ask; I didn’t really want her to buy a swimsuit.

Heinrich said that he would tag along, and Adelia also said she would go after some hesitation.

"I’ll stay here."

“Yeah, do that."

It seemed like Harriet wanted to rest in the mansion, not feeling like going anywhere. I thought about following after her, but looking at Harriet’s expression, it seemed like she wanted to be left alone.

I had to give her something, though.

I didn’t know if it would make her feel better.

“I want to stay here as well.”

I decided to stay in the mansion, too.

* * *

Everyone left the mansion and headed towards Rajak. It seemed like they would be taking a carriage, as we were in a suburban area, so it was quite a distance away.

Harriet and I were the only ones left in the mansion.

-*Knock, knock*

“…What?”

When I knocked on the door of Harriet's room, she opened it while wearing an incredibly depressed expression on her face.

"Let's talk."

"…"

Harriet came out of her room without saying even a single word. We went to the terrace at the end of the hallway where the guest rooms were located—the place where Ellen and I had talked the previous night. Harriet sat down on one of the chairs.

Of course, it was daytime by then, so we were treated to a refreshing view quite different from the night view.

"Are you angry?"

Normally, I would have asked her if she was pouting, but if I had done that, she would have gotten hurt even more.

"I'm not angry." Harriet muttered with a melancholic look in her eyes.

"It's just… I was so worried about you guys. And yet you said something like I didn't need to know about these kinds of things… It felt like you were saying that I wouldn't understand even if you told me about what happened…"

Harriet clenched her little fists.

"That's why I feel so disappointed."

She had stayed up all night worrying about us and had even made some artifacts for us.

As she knew that it was able to protect us, she was both worried and slightly excited to find out in what way it helped us.

However, the only answer that came back was that she didn't have to know.

She couldn't help but feel incredibly disappointed.

Ellen felt guilty for being unable to tell her anything, so that was what caused that chilly atmosphere that morning.

If one were to just leave them alone, it was pretty much clear that the funeral-house-like atmosphere would continue.

"We aren't dismissing you."

"…"

"It's just… Something hard to talk about. That's all."

Back in the Darklands, we had felt like we had to do something, as if someone was chasing after us. However, after we returned to a safe environment, we realized what we had done.

Harriet looked at me, as I was speaking in a tone that I had never used before.

I pulled something out of my pocket and placed it on the table.

-Clunk

It was a pair of earrings.

"What… are those?"

"I picked these up on the way here." (T/N: Korean pick-up line in the sense of I picked up my heart on the way to you.)

"…?"

I just wanted to say something like that once, but Harriet didn't seem to understand.

"I got them while we were over there. You use them."

"…What are they?"

"Earrings. Don't you even know that much?"

They were useless to me. Ellen, who had an even stronger mentality than I—who

was supported by Sacred Spirit—also had no use for them.

I could sell them, but then I started to think about who would need them, and eventually, I came to a conclusion.

“I heard they are artifacts that have Tranquility magic enchanted on them. Neither Ellen nor I really need these, so I’m giving them to you. If you could stay calm when using magic, you’d have an easier time casting, right?”

Harriet seemed quite bewildered at my words that the object before her was an artifact with a permanent enchantment engraved on it.

Above all, she couldn’t understand why I was giving it to her.

“Where… Did you get these?”

“As I said, that’s hard for me to talk about."

I smirked at her.

“Although this is kind of a bribe… Please take this and let go.”

It might have been disappointing; she might have felt upset that I didn’t tell her anything.

“However, to tell you one thing, I risked my life to get them.”

“…”

I didn’t give her any details, but I managed to tell her that we only managed to get those after a lot of hard work—something we risked our lives for.

They fell into her hands. Harriet grabbed the earrings and just shook her head.

“I… also wanted to be of help.”

“Your bracelets really helped.”

“…I also wanted to go with you.”

Tears dripped on Harriet's hands as she looked down.

"But there was no way that they would let a kid like me go somewhere so dangerous. When I asked, I-I almost got in trouble… Dad almost locked me up in my room in case I ran away. Only after Dad confirmed that you two were back… was I able to leave my room."

Harriet wanted to goto the Darklands with us, but of course, her parents wouldn't allow something like that.

So Harriet seemed to have been incarcerated, not spending a fun vacation.

Only after it was confirmed that we had returned to Temple did the Grand Duke of Saint-Owan allow Harriet to go out.

That was the decision the Grand Duke of Saint-Owan made.

If Harriet had followed us, she wouldn't have been able to deal with those things. It was actually weirder that Ellen and I, who suffered from that much trauma, managed to hold on like we did.

It wasn't that we treated her like a child. It would be weird for anyone to be able to handle something like that with ease, to begin with.

"Me too… I'm good with magic, I'm better than anyone… So… Then…"

Harriet was sobbing while clutching the earrings I gave her.

"Why was I not allowed to go with you guys?"

Harriet seemed to feel frustrated all on her own because she thought she wasn't recognized as a proper wizard. It seemed that she thought that if she was able to play her role better than anyone else, then she would have been able to travel with us.

Because her parents didn't recognize her abilities, and she herself knew that she wasn't good enough.

—Harriet seemed to have felt deep disappointment during her vacations.

"It couldn't be helped this time, right?"

"…"

She could already use more than enough practical magic. Her skills should have improved by a lot since the time we were on the uninhabited island. However, she only lacked cooperative abilities. If she wanted to, we could have gone together.

However, there was still the question of whether she would be able to handle herself or not.

If I ever decided to do something like that again, I had no intention of taking her with me.

What Harriet seemed to need at that moment was that lie, however.

"Thank you… Reinhardt."

Harriet didn't ask any more questions about what we went through.

"I'll cherish them."

She was crying while clutching her earrings.

CHAPTER 175

Harriet seemed to be more sad than angry because she was unable to help us. She was dismissed by her family because she was still a kid, but she felt even more sad because even we seemed to dismiss her.

So what she felt was slightly different from being angry.

Eventually, Harriet seemed to feel better because of my words that time around.

She and I talked a bit more on the terrace. Harriet wore the pair of earrings I had given her—they weren't that fancy; they were simple button-type earrings with an emerald half the size of a baby's fingernail embedded in them. They didn't really stand out much, so they felt just right as jewelry for a girl.

"Th-this… Thanks… I feel a little weird."

The corners of Harriet's mouth twitched slightly. She had a slightly blank look in her eyes.

"What do you mean, weird?"

"How should I describe it… If I had to put it into words… I feel a little nauseous…?"

I definitely felt that it was a magical artifact, but it seemed like she felt a little weird because the tranquilizing magic was stabilizing her mind.

Was it because the spell kind of forced Harriet, who had always been rather high strung, to seem more like Ellen? That might actually feel really strange to her.

I believd one could think of those earrings as an automatic tranquilizer administrator.

"You don't have to wear them all the time, got it? Only when it's necessary."

"O-okay… Sorry."

I gave them to her as a gift, but she felt sorry that she couldn't wear them all the time. No, I actually gave them to her while thinking that she should only wear them when it was absolutely necessary.

“But I don’t know how valuable these things are, so just how rare were these things? If it’s your family, you probably have a warehouse full of much better items, right?”

That was what I was worried about before giving her that gift.

The Duchy of Saint-Owan was a territory famous for its magic. The Grand Duke of Saint Owan, whom I had seen before, was an Archmage, so there was a good chance that there were hundreds of better magic artifacts in their warehouse, even if Harriet would hang onto my gift.

So I was debating whether I should give the earrings to her or not. However, I felt a lot better after giving them to her. Harriet took off the weird earrings and held them to her chest, thinking for a moment.

“There are three main categories for determining the rarity and price of magical artifacts. One: the number of uses. Two: what type of magic it could evoke. And three: the object that got enchanted.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah. A single-use magic scroll is also deemed as a magic artifact, you know?”

Magic scrolls were disposable items. Harriet told me to wait for a moment and then went into her room, bringing something back with her—it was a wand about thirty centimeters long.

"What’s that? A magic wand or something?”

“It’s a self-defense weapon. I took it with me in case something unexpected happened. There are usually two types of magic wands and staffs. Some help to stabilize or control the user’s mana flow, and others are charged with magic spells. The difference between those and magic scrolls is that only people who know how to use magic can use them.”

A wand or staff might help one in the use of magic or may be charged with magic spells.

"There are ten charges of Chain Lightning stored in here."

“Then it’s a lot more valuable than a scroll, right?”

"That’s right. In some cases, these items become useless as soon as the number of spells stored in them had been used up, and there are some that can be recharged. Of course, the rechargeable kind is more difficult and expensive to make. This one’s a rechargeable artifact."

Using that artifact enabled one to use the high-ranking destruction magic spell called Chain Lightning 10 times, and one could recharge it—it probably was a very powerful magic artifact.

…There was a reason that she felt so confident in being able to follow us, as she had something like that she could place her trust in.

“However, there are exceptions. These earrings are a little similar to my wand. The magic spell was permanently engraved into the artifact itself, so if you pour in your own magical power, the magic spell imprinted on it gets activated.”

“…I see.”

“These types are the rarest. Because one could cast the engraved spell directly without having to cast it. Things like these are incredibly rare. As far as I know, it takes every technology and practice I know of to make something like these earrings.”

The rarity of magical artifacts varied depending on the number of times one could use it and whether it was rechargeable or not.

In other words, artifacts with permanently imprinted magic spells were incredibly rare. I realized then what a ridiculous item the Flame of Tuesday hanging around my neck was.

Even a wand or staff with a single spell permanently engraved in it was treated as an ancient relic, but to use the Flame of Tuesday, one didn’t even need to be a wizard—it could create fire just by one’s will. It was an item that enabled one to use one type of element and not only one type of spell.

I already thought it was a great treasure, but hearing those things from Harriet made

me realize just how powerful a magical artifact it was. It was probably one of the greatest treasures one could find on the continent.

“However, that’s only the case for destruction magic. Things like defensive and support magic are often engraved permanently. Engraving destruction magic that can be triggered is really difficult after all.”

Harriet showed me the earrings I had given her, holding them between her index finger and her thumb.

“They are small.”

“…?”

“Do you think it’s easy to permanently engrave spells on such small objects? It’s not even a low-level spell like Lightweight—it’s a spell to stabilize one’s mind. Although Tranquility isn’t a spell of the highest order, it’s a mid-to-high-ranking mental spell. Just by wearing these little things on one’s ears, one could enjoy their effects. It couldn’t have been easy to make these.”

The third way to determine the rarity of a magical artifact was to look at the item itself.

In other words, the size mattered. Large items such as armor and swords were easy to enchant. However, in the case of ornaments and jewelry, it seemed like a very high level of skill was required to enchant them.

And the earrings I had given Harriet were half the size of a baby’s fingernail.

“So… they are very valuable…”

Harriet looked at me and smiled.

There was only one reason why Harriet would give me such a long explanation to my question of how valuable they were.

“Thank you, Reinhardt.”

She was trying to explain to me the worth of my gift that I was completely oblivious about and thank me.

“Erm… esteemed guests?”

And as we were chatting away on the terrace, someone suddenly came to us.

It was the mansion’s head maid.

“What?”

In response to my words, she muttered something in a slightly perplexed tone of voice.

“There… There has been a problem.”

“A problem?”

“…The young lady left her wallet behind.”

‘Ah. That clutz idiot.’

She would forget her own head if it wasn’t attached.

* * *

Being a clutz idiot was a bit different from being an idiot.

Although one seemed to be doing quite well for themselves, one would make unexpected mistakes at weird times.

That was what applied to Liana de Grantz.

She planned and prepared everything before she left to shop, but when she arrived and wanted to pay for something… she couldn’t seem to find where she put her wallet.

That was what kind of situation she was in.

The servants probably were incredibly surprised when they saw a bag of gold coins just lying on Liana’s bedside table when they were cleaning her room.

Of course, since she was a great noble, her name held more than enough credits, so

she could just act like that with Duke Grantz as her shield.

However, that wasn't the Imperial Capital.

Even though she was a noble, I wasn't sure if the prestige of Duke Grantz would suffice on those distant southern islands across the sea.

She didn't even take any attendants, except one coachman, with her.

"…Adelia didn't take her wallet with her either."

"…I think the same goes for Ellen."

We looked through everyone's luggage. While we couldn't confirm whether Heinrich took some with him or not, we ascertained that Adelia and Ellen didn't take any money with them.

Although we were sure, we didn't believe that Heinrich actually took it with him. He didn't go with them to buy something. He just wanted to follow Liana.

Duke Grantz's wizard could teleport those things to them, but the guy seemed to be busy until the day we would return to Temple—that seemed to be the reason why the servants tried asking us, as they didn't have much of a choice.

At that rate, something like the Grand Duchy's young lady, excited to treat her friends to something, unable to pay for anything because she stupidly forgot her money, would happen. They would have to wash dishes because they didn't have enough money after eating—that would be a huge disgrace.

"Well… Now that I think of it, they should have already reached Rajak, so how are we even going to get there if we wanted to take their wallets to them?"

Wouldn't it be better to wait for them to come back after they were done with whatever they were doing?

I didn't think we'd be able to find them if we just went there. Harriet nodded silently.

"Did one of them take their student ID with them?"

What Harriet said, that one of them might have taken their student ID with them, was quite plausible. Well, although Ellen might not have taken it with her, one of the others might have. Our Temple student ID could be treated as a regular ID card. One never knew when one might need something like that.

“Can you locate their student IDs?”

“Yes.”

Harriet nodded her head.

“I now know how to access the tracking magic placed on the student IDs.”

That seemed to be a result of my sudden disappearance a while back.

During that incident, Harriet seemed to have studied how to access the tracking magic placed on our student IDs. Of course, I had actually artificially blocked the spell at that time.

How should I put it?

I felt proud, sad, and grateful.

That was it.

* * *

The servant requested our help as if grasping at straws in case that girl would suffer from humiliation, but that somehow seemed to have been the correct decision.

Harriet and I borrowed a horse from the mansion to catch up to them as fast as possible

“…Do you know how to ride a horse?”

“…I learned how to do it a while ago.”

Harriet’s eyes widened at the fact that I knew how to ride a horse. Obviously, Harriet knew how to do it, as it was a basic skill for any great noble.

Of course, it would have been a rather big problem if we fell off the horse while in a hurry to get to Rajak, so Harriet and I only rode at a slightly faster pace.

We weren't too far away from Rajak. We also rode a horse there, so, soon we reached the outskirts of the city where horses and wagons were placed.

"Look, that carriage… It has Duke Grantz's crest."

We could immediately find Duke Grantz's carriage, as it was just the most dazzling among all the carriages parked there.

We left our horse with the waiting coachman and entered the city of Rajak.

"…This feels like a port city."

"Yeah."

Although the sea was pretty far from the place, I could still smell the scent of the sea wafting over it. However, the smell was more refreshing than unpleasantly fishy.

Rajak was a very busy city, however not as much as the Capital. Placed on a hilltop and a steep cliff some distance away, I could see a building that seemed to be the Royal Castle of the Edina Kingdom.

When we went into the city, it went slightly downhill, like a slope, giving us a panoramic view of the city.

There were numerous ships coming and going at the great harbor and docks.

"This place hasn't implemented Warp Gates yet."

Harriet was staring at the moving ships in amazement. Due to the Warp Gate technology, trade routes had been drastically shortened, so that way of transportation seemed to be a thing of the past.

Overall, there were many white buildings, so the city looked rather clean than eye-catching. I could see then why Liana said that the place was only a lesser-known tourist destination.

Looking at those huge ships sailing back and forth in the transparent sea made me feel kind of good for some reason. The port town was like out of a painting, not dirty or filled with an oily and watery smell about it.

“Let’s go look for those guys.”

“Yes.”

Harriet closed her eyes and fell silent for a short moment as she casted the tracking magic. After some time, Harriet opened her eyes again.

“Uhm, over there."

Harriet pointed her finger in one direction, but I couldn’t quite tell where exactly she was pointing.

Harriet took the lead, and I followed after her.

”Magic really is fascinating.”

Harriet wore a strange smile as we walked.

“What?”

“To be honest, I learned that student ID tracking magic because of what happened last time… However, even if it’s not you, someone might disappear again, so that’s why I tried hard to learn this.”

It seemed that Harriet studied such magic because she held regrets like, “I wish I knew more, I wish I knew magic that I could have used in that situation.”

“But I can’t believe I’m using this spell just to return someone’s money bag…”

She had studied that spell in case someone went missing again, but she would have

never imagined that her first application for it was to return a friend's money bag to them. She ended up using it in a way completely different from its original purpose. Harriet found that quite curious.

"Well, the same happened with the underwater breathing spell as well."

"So you just learn some magic because you think it's interesting and just use it right away, huh?"

She would completely skip all the middle steps.

If you want to learn a spell, just learn it. What's so hard about it?

I wasn't a magic major, but I had a feeling that if her major classmates heard her talking like that, they might hit her. A genius was still a genius.

Harriet first frowned and then looked at me with a sneer.

"Well, I always said that I was smart. Why are you acting as if you just found that out?"

"When did I ever say that you weren't smart? I just said that you're a bit of an idiot."

"There it is! Y-y-you called me i-idiot again!"

Harriet blushed as she complained to me.

I liked that girl's tension way better. It had been a long time since I saw her angry, so I instantly felt better.

Ah.

It seemed like I really was a sadist. Only limited to her, through.

"Anyway, let's hurry up and find the others, idiot."

"Are you doing this on purpose to make me angry when I was just about to forget about that?! You act all nice to me, but you always do this to me! It always ends up

like this!”

Sorry.

To be honest, it felt like I was doing a daily quest.

I didn’t really have to do it, but if I broke my chain, I would feel kind of upset.

“How did you know? Rather, why did you notice that only now?”

"You’re so annoying!”

-Hit!

She huffed and clenched her fist in anger, then hit my chest.

“What? Did you hit me just now?”

“And you’re not even hurt! My hand hurts even more!”

The situation was rather embarrassing, as I couldn’t even feel that punch of hers.

* * *

Just where were those kids, and what were they doing?

After we wandered around the city for quite a long time, Harriet suddenly sighed.

“What’s the matter?"

“…This situation seems to be more complicated than we expected.”

Well, there might be more to it than we first thought, but how did she know that something was clearly amiss?

“Why do you think so?”

“Their location hasn’t changed. They are still in the same place.”

I believed that I vaguely knew what she was talking about. The location of the others

Harriet sensed was exactly the same even after we walked around for such a long time—that was why we could make some guesses.

Maybe they were stranded somewhere, or maybe they realized that they didn't have any money on them. That would mean that Heinrich, our last hope, didn't have any money on him either.

"We're almost there. It's over that way."

The place Harriet was pointing towards was a pretty big restaurant.

CHAPTER 176

Harriet and I entered the restaurant where the traces of the others had led. As soon as we entered, four people who were sitting before a table with a huge amount of emptied plates, seeming unable to leave, caught our eye.

It was just as Harriet predicted.

"Hey, those idiots are really here."

“Don’t call me an idi—! Ah. U-urg…”

I didn’t refer to her that time, but she still reacted to the word on reflex, her face turning completely red.

Every time she heard the word “Idiot”, she would think that I was calling her.

I had trained her so well.

Heinrich, Ellen, Liana, and Adelia, who went there without any gold, were all staring blankly at the two of us.

“There’s a limit to how careless one could be. You completely forgot to bring any money on a shopping trip? Should I also call you an idiot?”

“I’m not an idiot!”

-Shove

Liana opened her mouth wide as she looked at the gold coin pouch right in front of her.

* * *

Before starting their shopping spree for real, it seemed like Liana wanted to have something to eat first, telling the others that there was a really delicious restaurant in Rajak.

She knew that Ellen always ate a lot, so she ordered many different dishes from the menu, and just when they were about to leave after eating their fill, she realized that none of them brought any money with them.

And as I expected, it seemed like Liana making a fuss about being the daughter of Duke Grantz didn't work.

So all of them just sat back down, staring blankly and thinking about how to overcome the situation.

That was when Harriet and I had appeared out of nowhere.

"Student ID tracking?"

When Liana asked how we were to find them right away, Harriet provided an answer. Adelia looked a little surprised that she actually studied such a spell.

"When did you learn that again?"

"I just learned it on the side."

Adelia studied magic that would earn her money, but Harriet studied magic that caught her interest. She felt like she lost against her again that day. Just talking with Harriet normally made Adelia feel inferior.

Ellen's eyes met mine.

Harriet seemed to be feeling better, so she seemed to be curious about the reason behind the change. I just gave her a slight shrug. I couldn't really tell her the truth right then.

"Anyway, I'm glad… Thank you, you two."

Liana sighed in relief.

Heinrich didn't look very pleased for some reason. Honestly speaking, it was Harriet who played the biggest role there, so I wondered if I really helped her.

Liana just said, “Whatever.” as she looked at me.

“Hey, you worked hard, so I’ll buy you a swimsuit as well.”

“…So, you think I came all the way here just to get you to buy me a swimsuit? I only had 100 percent, absolutely, perfectly, pure and good intentions here, you know?”

“…You’re capable of something like that? You didn’t do this for some kind of reward?”

Liana made an overly surprised gesture as if she never expected me to do something like that.

“Even if I’m a beggar, I'm not that much of a jerk, ya know?”

“Oh, but I do know that. You have some kind of conscience, after all, right?”

“…I shouldn’t go against you, huh?”

What was the difference between Harriet and her?

Any provocation I sent her way never really struck a nerve, and—quite the contrary—I always end up with a slap to the face. Their conversational skills were just on completely different levels.

As I shut my mouth as if fed up with her bullshit, Harriet stared at Liana with admiration etched into her face.

"Liana, just what is your secret?”

“…My secret?”

“Only you are able to make that guy shut up like this. Just how are you doing it?”

“If you wanna talk about that shit, how about doing it somewhere, where I can’t hear you, huh?”

"Oh, stop being noisy.”

Harriet seemed to be really curious about how Liana managed to brush me off so easily. She just looked at me and shrugged.

“He pretends to be all crazy, but he actually isn’t that crazy, you know? Just act boldly.”

“So you just let me hear everything.”

“Bold… Boldly?”

Harriet tilted her head and seemed to recall the previous day’s occurrence.

Oh, touch it… if you can.

That was probably what she was thinking about.

Harriet then gazed at me, giving me a meaningful look.

“…Hey, there’s this thing called personality, you know?”

“What? Pe-Personality?”

“Yeah, I might not be able to do anything against her, but things are different for you.”

It wasn’t about what one said, it was about who said it. No matter how much she learned from her, she would never be another Liana de Grantz. She was Harriet de Saint-Owan, so the results might be completely different.

Even if two different people said the same old joke, some would make it fall flat, and others would get reactions like, “Wahaha, you’re such a witty guy and so eloquent!” That was just how it was!

Even though it was the same joke, there would be so many different reactions depending on who said it! Isn’t that just unfair?

It’s not like I experienced that or anything.

“I have no idea what bold action you’re thinking of doing, but I advise you to just

behave. Because I might make you hate me for real."

As I smiled with quite the creepy expression on my face, Harriet's face began to blanch.

I can't do anything to Liana, but to you?

What do you think I'll do to you, huh?

Harriet seemed to imagine quite a few things in her head.

"Wha… Wha-what. Y-you pervert! D-don't come closer, you crazy pervert!"

Harriet's face turned red, and she covered her chest as she screamed.

No, I didn't actually say anything about that kind of stuff, you know? Why was she making a fuss all on her own?

"What kind of bold thing were you thinking of doing for you to react like that?"

"N-no! No-nothing really. I didn't say anything!"

"Then why did you call me a pervert?"

"I-I… I don't know!"

No matter how much Liana taught her, it wouldn't change anything.

Her and my personalities just perfectly complemented each other.

* * *

Anyway, they received their money, so they ended up shopping for swimsuits, which was their original purpose.

By the way…

I really don't think that the actual Middle Ages have anything to do with Medieval Fantasy, but wasn't that just too much?

There were specialized swimwear stores, and I couldn't even tell the difference between the fabric they used and the fabric we used in modern times, you know? I knew synthetic fibers and modern clothing were also pretty blatant, but what the fuck?

Well…

What should one call this world, which had a lot more modern aspects than medieval ones? What kind of crazy world did I create?

As I thought, my conclusion was still the same.

If I thought any more about that, I'd lose.

There were swimwear stores.

And we were there to buy a swimsuit.

Anything else didn't matter!

Our purpose was to buy a swimsuit for Ellen, but Liana also tried some on while looking for one for Ellen to see if she saw one she wanted to buy for herself.

"How is it?"

When she tried on a swimsuit, she would ask me and the others for our opinion.

"Uhm, that's… Erm, very… I think it suits you very well."

"Look properly and tell me. How can you even know that it looks on me when you aren't even looking?"

Heinrich stumbled over his words, telling her she looked good even though he didn't manage to look at her. The cold sweat rolling down his face increased even more after he was to look at her properly first before opening his mouth. After hearing Heinrich's reply, Liana looked at me next.

"Hey, look at me."

"Oh, it looks good on you."

“…You didn’t even try to look, did you?”

“Well, what clothes wouldn’t look good on the beautiful and noble young lady Grantz?”

"Are you trying to piss me off?”

I looked elsewhere and answered quite half-heartedly, so Liana just asked the other kids if the swimsuit looked good on her. Ellen would just wear whatever Liana picked for her, no matter what it looked like.

“…”

It seemed that she didn’t feel any way about what she was wearing as she looked in the mirror. Of course, our young lady Grantz was obviously superior in height and style, but Ellen couldn’t just be dismissed either. Adelia and Harriet were looking at her in a bikini.

“Wow…”

"I-I should also… exercise more…”

Both were looking at her with clear envy in their eyes.

She was wearing a basic black bikini.

“It suits you."

I couldn’t look at her for long because I started feeling strange.

It wasn’t that I liked her, more like I felt guilty?

So I just said that it looked good on her, which was the truth.

After that, Ellen looked at herself in the mirror for quite some time.

* * *

Liana and Ellen changed into a lot of different swimsuits as if they wouldn’t get tired from trying on every single one in the store. Adelia and Harriet also looked around

for one they might take a fancy on.

Of course, I also chose something for myself, though I just picked some swimming trunks that seemed to fit properly, although I didn't try them on.

"Can you only buy one after you tried on dozens first?"

I really hated shopping for extended periods of time! If you just walked around for two hours going from store to store only to realize that you liked the one you saw first, you'd feel like you wasted a ton of time.

Although this was like some kind of modern medieval fantasy, there was no need for something like that, so why was it still like that?

Liana tilted her head as if she didn't know what I was talking about.

"What do you mean by 'buy one'?"

Liana pointed to the stack of swimsuits she had tried on.

"I'll buy all of them."

Ah.

The Duke of Grantz, who had mansions all over the continent, was well aware of the young lady's spending.

* * *

In the end, both Ellen and Liana bought a lot of swimsuits.

"What if something you bought now doesn't fit you anymore later on…"

"I'll just buy new ones."

"I see."

What if it didn't fit anymore? Just throw all of them away and buy new ones.

Rich people really were on a completely different level with a completely different way of thinking.

Because we finished our errand, we could go back to the mansion and play around again, whether we'd be swimming or resting.

Liana was on an outing with her friends, so it was somewhat understandable that she didn't bring one of her attendants along. She might have thought that Adelia would feel out of place.

So, both Ellen and Liana were carrying their own full shopping bags.

Ellen was a complete monster, so she wasn't really struggling with carrying all that stuff.

"It's good that you have enough money to live the way you do, and yet you didn't even think of taking it with you?"

"…I know."

A clumsy beauty.

She was always messing up something in some way.

"Give it here."

I took half of Liana's luggage. If we were talking about strength, I was second after Ellen there. When I just took half of her stuff, Liana stared at me and held out the rest of it.

"Hey, just take everything while you're at it."

"Girl."

"I-I'll take it!"

"Huh… Sure. Thanks."

In the end, Heinrich von Schwarz took the rest. Of course, Harriet, Adelia, and Liana split up again as I was wondering just how little strength she actually had. I felt a

small amount of pity for her as we followed them.

In fact, they bought quite a lot of things.

As we were trying to get out of Rajak, I overheard some people making a lot of noise in the crowd.

-Why did you drink so much in the middle of the day!? Huh?

-I'm… I'm alright…! Yeah!

-Have you been to the bar of that bitch Airi or something again?! I just don't get it!

-I'm not…! Urg, drunk.

-You're going to ruin your whole home, you idiot! Only drinking and not working!

What could I say?

Although I didn't run into Airi, I sure could hear her name floating around everywhere.

Her liquor business was going so well that she was even getting customers in the middle of the day.

-*Clank!*

-I'm going to find that fox bitch and kill her!

That was…

I heard stories about households being led to ruin everywhere.

She was doing fine, right? She wanted to make a lot of money, and she actually managed to do just that.

Making a lot of money was good and all, but if things kept going like that, wouldn't she end up stabbed in some alley? Of course, she had told me that she was confident in her strength and skills.

'Since I had a lot of free time on hand, maybe I should just go to Rajak on my own and visit her.'

With those thoughts, I left Rajak.

* * *

After returning to the villa, We went to the beach like before. Ellen and Liana wore their new swimsuits and played on the beach like before as well, although they decided not to explore the underwater world.

I lay on a sunbed and watched them from afar. I didn't really feel like going into the water that day.

—Adelia, Ellen, Harriet, and Liana.

I drank something as I watched the four of them having fun.

Harriet seemed to be in a much better mood than the day before, so all was good. I just sat back and blankly watched the scenery.

I was thinking about just working out. However, it was quite funny for me to work out there when I planned on thoroughly resting.

"Hey."

Heinrich von Schwarz called out to me.

"Huh, what?"

"Aren't you going to play?"

That guy was wearing his swimsuit as well as a shirt. Of course, I didn't wear my swimsuit because I didn't intend to go swimming.

"Not today, at least."

"…Really?"

Was it too much for him to be all alone with the girls? He just stood beside me and murmured quietly.

"Did… Did really nothing happen in the Darklands?"

"Yeah, I said so, right?"

"But it's the Darklands. Isn't it dangerous?"

He seemed to be wondering if I just didn't want to talk about what happened in the Darklands or if really nothing happened.

"We didn't even go to the dangerous places, to begin with."

"…If you didn't plan on going anywhere dangerous, why did you go there in the first place?"

Hmm.

Why was he asking me that?

"Did you want me to gamble away my life? We just thought it would be better to be careful."

No matter what I said, it would only be lies anyway, so I felt too lazy to even think about it properly. I didn't care what that guy thought of me.

"So, you were making a huge deal of going to the Darklands, but acted like a coward and didn't do anything there?"

"…"

I glanced at Heinrich. He seemed a little dazed when I looked at him.

“Oh, well.”

“Hah, if it were me, I would’ve at least taken a Goblin’s head with me.”

“And how do you think you’d do that?"

“Look, I’m not the same I was before.”

-*Fuoooosh*!

After concentrating for a bit, a fire was lit in the middle of the sand. I didn’t want to pay him any attention, but it seemed like his activation speed and level of control had risen considerably since that one night I saw him practice.

It seemed like he had put a lot of effort into his ability.

“I see. You must have worked really hard.”

Heinrich seemed a little taken aback by my casual reaction. Perhaps he was hoping that I would be a little more surprised.

It seemed like he wanted me to be envious or something like that.

However, I could already do what Heinrich just showed me with the Flame of Tuesday. Even if I didn’t have the Flame of Tuesday, I would have no reason to react strongly.

My ability was my ability, and his ability was his ability.

"So, you finally realized that it would do you no good to argue with me like before.”

With that, the boy walked towards the beach with a grin on his face. There were a few things I wanted to hurl at his turned head.

Want me to wipe the floor with you?

Why the fuck are you trying to build some kind of rival relationship with me?

If it were the past me, I would have hit him right away, but I didn’t really want to. I felt too tired already to get angry over such trivial disputes.

I felt like my mentality had reached the next level.

* * *

After swimming, everyone washed up and had some dinner. They didn't look as tired because they didn't decide to swim all day as they did previously.

However, all of them seemed to plan on going to bed early because they wanted to be up early the next day.

"Will you be okay?"

"…Yes."

Ellen was also plagued by nightmares the night before. I asked her because there was no guarantee that she would have such dreams again, but Ellen just vaguely nodded her head.

By the way, there was still a lot of time left, so I was thinking of going back to Rajak to meet Airi, but I would have to tell the others that I'd go on my own.

I thought about it before going to sleep, and right before I slipped into unconsciousness…

-*Knock, knock*

Someone knocked on my door. I thought it was Ellen, so I went to see, but it was actually Liana.

"Come out."

"…Why so suddenly?"

"Just come out."

What did she want from me in the middle of the night?

Liana grinned at me.

"One should have a drink on nights like these, you punk."

‘Ah.’

‘Big sis.’

‘You’re the best, big sis!’

CHAPTER 177

The place where Liana took me was the largest room in the mansion. Only illuminated by a single weak light, the room was filled with a soft yellow light.

It wasn't only me; the others were also sitting around the table or on the sofa in the room. I was the last to arrive.

And there on the table were ice buckets filled with unnamed bottles.

"…Wow."

"If the servants saw us drinking, they would make a fuss, so I waited until they went to their accommodations."

I had arrived as fast as lightning because I heard there'd be alcohol.

The situation was like some kids secretly drinking some alcohol on a field trip. It was something very common, but it actually happened in this world, so it felt kind of weird.

Just how much was this world mixed with our modern one?

Although it was still a bit different. because the alcohol on the table wasn't soju, but some liquor with high alcohol content. By the way, I wasn't actually sure if minors were allowed to drink stuff like that in this world. Harriet's expression showed some slight excitement, and so did Heinrich's and Adelia's.

"Have you drunk before?"

"Yeah, not much, though."

I nodded my head at Liana's question. Ellen just sat still. It seemed that Liana actually ate and drank a lot of things in secret.

Wasn't she a complete problem child? She was even trying to make her classmates drink alcohol.

The more I got to know about her, the more surprised I was.

“If you don’t want to drink, no one will force you.”

Liana skillfully opened one of the bottles and poured its content into each of our cups.

Then she put some ice in them.

“B-but… What if we get in trouble?”

“I’ve never drunk before…”

Harriet and Adelia looked a bit nervous and scared.

“Who’s gonna scold you? Just do it once and you’ll see.”

She was someone who would be forgiven, no matter what she did wrong. Ellen stared at the golden liquid in her cup.

Come to think of it, back when we were in the Darklands, Ellen had told me that if I were to drink, she wanted to drink together with me, so she was probably curious about it.

However, it felt like that promise would get fulfilled in a very different setting. Heinrich was looking at the alcohol in his glass with some nervousness apparent on his face.

I wasn’t really worried.

I immediately downed the whiskey in my glass.

“Kuaah… That is it.”

I had no reason to refuse the drink, as I had already decided to play around there anyway. Everyone was staring at me blankly as I drank the stuff without hesitation.

That hot sensation down my throat…

That was it.

It has been so long that I had almost forgotten how it felt.

“W-well… Th-then me, too!”

Heinrich stared at his glass and then drank it as if he had made up his mind.

“Cough, cough, cough!”

Then he coughed multiple times, seeming as if he had choked.

“Haaah… Haaah… M-my throat feels like it's burning up.”

Liana, who patted Heinrich on his back for a bit, sighed. One had to be prepared for what one poured down one’s throat, or else one’s body would just reject it, you idiot.

“This isn't a drink you can drink in one shot. That guy’s just weird.”

Liana warned Heinrich not to follow my example because I was being weird by drinking it like a shot. Adelia and Harriet tilted their heads and drank a bit of the whisky by sticking their tongues into their glasses.

“Bitter!”

“Urgh…”

Ellen also took a sip before she slightly narrowed her brows.

“Bitter.”

Yeah, what did those guys even know about the taste of alcohol? Liana seemed to have expected that they would react like that, so she uncorked another bottle.

“Then you guys should drink sweet ones.”

Liana, who seemed to prefer sweet liquors, poured some into those three’s glasses and her own. After seeing her differentiating the alcohol like that, she couldn’t have just drunk one or two bottles, could she?

She left Temple every weekend to return to Duke Grantz’s mansion in the Capital. Could it be that she didn’t do that because she felt more comfortable at home but

because she couldn't drink in Temple?

I felt almost certain about that.

After all three of them drank the sweet wine, they nodded.

"Woow, this is delicious."

Harriet.

"Yes… It's sweet."

Adelia.

"This is okay."

And Ellen's reaction.

"Is that so? Then you can just drink this."

Liana looked at me, grabbed a bottle, and giggled.

"You don't like sweet things, right?"

"Yeah. I'm fine."

She seemed to have remembered the time when we went to the dessert cafe and I had mentioned that. Of course, I could clearly see Heinrich's eyebrows narrow a bit when he heard that.

"How about you, Heinrich? Want some of this, too? If it's too strong…"

"…No, I'll stick with this."

Liana probably had no idea that Heinrich was actually interested in her, so she probably didn't realize that her words were provoking him quite a bit, either.

Why was he always trying to compete with me? That brat. Of course, I knew that he didn't want to appear weak before the girl he was interested in.

‘I’m not your rival or something, you bastard.’

I couldn’t really tell him that, so I just sat back and watched.

* * *

Liana, Heinrich, and I had whiskey.

Ellen, Harriet, and Adelia drank the sweet wine.

We had chocolate and cheese as snacks.

As that was the first time for most of them, everyone just casually drank a glass or two.

However, usually in those cases, one suddenly started thinking something like:

Huh? This is delicious, isn’t it? And I’m not even drunk!

Then, all of a sudden, one would wake up to an unfamiliar ceiling.

“H-hey. That’s not juice. Drink it slowly. Then you’ll get a bit tipsy.”

“…?”

“Listen, the feeling of drunkenness only comes after some time. So drink slowly, Ellen.”

“Okay. Understood.”

Ellen kept on gulping down glasses of wine like grape juice, so she had to be extra careful. Harriet and Adelia, who did the same as Ellen, began to restrain themselves at my words.

"But I sure wonder what Ellen would be like when drunk.”

Liana stared at Ellen with a subtle smile on her lips. I was definitely curious about what she’d be like. Would she talk a lot more?

She might just fall asleep as well. One wouldn’t know how one would act while drunk

if one hadn’t been drunk before.

"By the way, what are you all planning on doing next semester? Like classes.”

Liana asked us what our plans would be for the next semester. So far, we hadn’t really talked that much with each other, as we were too busy playing around. So the only time we actually got to have a proper conversation was at that drinking party orchestrated by Liana.

“Well… I think things will be pretty similar to the first semester for me. I mostly attend magic classes… I think Adelia is in almost all of them as well. If anything… I might take more classes on alchemy this time around.”

“Yeah… My plans are pretty much similar to Harriet’s.”

Those two were the only ones in Class A who majored in magic, so it seemed like they planned on sticking together, even throughout the second semester.

Next, her eyes turned to me.

"Why would I do anything differently? Supernatural power training, meditation, and magic sensitivity training are more or less mandatory. Swordsmanship… I can’t really think of anything else.”

I thought about taking the same swordsmanship class as Ellen. It was more than obvious that I would have supernatural power training with Heinrich and Liana. The bigger picture didn't change, after all. Ellen seemed to ponder for a moment.

"I probably won’t do anything different either. If I had to say something… Maybe a Demon Ecology class.”

“…Demon Ecology?”

“Yes.”

All of us tilted our heads in confusion at her nonsensical words. I had no idea what kind of class Demon Ecology would be. However, judging by its name, it probably was a class in which one learned about demons.

Ellen probably realized when she dealt with the zombies that she had no prior

knowledge about them, so it seemed like she wanted to learn more in case she ever came across beings she didn't know again.

Well…

Right.

Actually, when I thought about it, I would probably have to learn those things the most. I might have to take that class with Ellen as well.

"Hmm… Demon Ecology. That sounds interesting. Should I take it too?"

Liana also seemed interested in that Demon Ecology class.

"By the way, why would you want to take a class on Demons when we won't ever meet… Ah."

Harriet immediately shut her mouth as she was posing the fundamental question of why she would want to pick a class like Demon Ecology in the first place. Something had happened in the Darklands. Something we couldn't tell her.

She thought that this was the reason, so she stopped asking. Ellen's expression darkened as she realized that she had made a slight mistake and let something slip.

When the mood got a little weird, Liana raised her glass.

"I shouldn't have mentioned classes while we still have vacation, so let's just drink."

When at a drinking party, one could just drink when the atmosphere got a bit awkward.

Was she really a high school student? Wasn't she actually someone possessing the soul of someone in their thirties or forties?

We chatted away about various things in that room illuminated by a dim yellow light.

* * *

"Come to think of it, there'll be a festival in our second semester."

That was a standard development in stories of the school life genre.

In Summer, it would be the sea. In Winter, it would be hot springs.

—And school festivals.

School life had gotten a bit boring lately, but I definitely put in something that would make one sad if they missed it. Therefore, the Temple Festival, which more than 100,000 people attended, was very grand.

“Umm… But as far as I know, the Royal Class wouldn’t just enjoy the festival… I heard…”

Harriet spoke a bit hesitantly. Liana nodded her head.

“Yeah, there’ll be a battle.”

A competition.

“With the Orbis class?”

There were two special classes in Temple.

—The Royal Class for talent, and the Orbis class for skill.

The Orbis class and Royal class would have a friendly match during the festival.

That was actually one of the main events of the Temple Festival.

In the original, there was a fierce rivalry between Class A and B within Royal Class, and outside of the class, it would be with the Orbis Class.

Those were the two types of rivals found in the novel.

So, in the first semester, Class A was introduced as the rival, and in the second semester, a new rivaling party called the Orbis class was introduced through the Festival.

To tell the truth, there were only a few people who had some skill, because students of Class A were purely chosen for their talent. If I had to pick some people to

represent Class A, it would be the three idiot brothers: Cayer Vioden, Erich de Lafaeri, and Kono Lint. Of course, in Kono Lint's case, it wasn't because of a lack of effort but because of the penalty of his ability.

However, students of the Orbis Class were purely chosen based on their actual abilities, no matter if their talents were inferior or not. That was why there were almost no lazy people among them—they were all very hard working.

In the original novel, the Royal Class would end up being defeated by them in their first year. Some of the most talented students would still win their individual matches, though.

Anyway, our confrontation with those guys was getting closer and closer.

"Close quarter combat majors can actually get hurt really badly, so watch out, the two of you."

Liana looked at Ellen and me alternately. Even though I was someone with supernatural powers, I somehow ended up as a close-quarter combat major.

"But… Do the guys from the Orbis Class really… hate us?"

Adelia asked cautiously, a little frightened. It was Harriet who answered.

"My second brother was in the Orbis Class. So he really hated it when I was chosen for the Royal Class. He didn't tell me not to go, though."

I didn't know just how many brothers she had exactly, but she had at least three. All of them seemed to be graduates of Temple, and her second brother seemed to be a graduate of the Orbis Class. Everyone looked at her, surprised, as that was the first time we had heard about that.

"As far as I know, they believe that we only believe in our talents and nothing else. The Teachers also deliberately try to motivate them like that, so it seems like they feel like they absolutely must not lose against us. This belief is actually really deeply ingrained in them."

That was what I knew as well.

—An elite group that received special treatment only because of their talents.

—And a group that only managed to become elites after a lot of hard work.

The Orbis Class hated the Royal Class a lot. However, the Royal Class was pretty much indifferent towards the Orbis Class.

In the end, it was just one-sided hate, which also came to be due to the Orbis Class's limitations.

In the lower years, one could still overcome the difference in talent through gruelling effort. However, as one went up in grade, the gap between the Orbis Class and the Royal Class would only widen. After they lost against the Orbis Class, they would realize that if they didn't put any effort into developing their talents, they would end up worse than any normal person out there. A person who would just bum around and not even try making an effort would end up as nothing but a bum.

To tell the truth, the Orbis Class actually made those lazy geniuses of the Royal Class into hard-working geniuses.

Effort could never surpass talent.

Because of that absurdity, the Orbis Class, who was all about effort, couldn't help but feel a sense of inferiority to the Royal Class.

Liana crossed her arms.

"I heard that the Royal Class's and Orbis Class's dormitories were built so far apart from each other so that students from either Class wouldn't encounter each other because, in the past, they would fight with each other whenever they had free time."

Whenever they had a chance, quarrels would ensue, and acts of violence would occur. They weren't even ordinary students but Temple's elite. If something went wrong, it wouldn't just end with a case of assault but murder.

Therefore, they had moved the Orbis Class's and Royal Class's dormitories far apart from each other so that they wouldn't even have a chance to encounter each other. Harriet sipped on her wine and sighed.

"But they say it's a lot better now. In the past, it seemed like they would go around in

their school uniform, and as soon as they spotted someone from the other Class, they would quarrel."

I didn't even know what the Orbis Class uniform looked like. However, I had never gotten into any quarrels with someone just because I was wearing the Royal Class's uniform.

Things had gotten better, so it wasn't like the past where they glowered at each other just for wearing their respective uniforms.

Still, the two Classes would never be on good terms.

And the official clash between those two opposing classes was scheduled for our second semester.

The Orbis Class would be sharpening their blades at the moment to defeat us. The Royal Class would lose in the team battle due to teamwork issues, and only some would win their individual battles. Ludwig would go up against Orbis Class's strongest first-year and would lose his individual match.

By the way, I had no idea what those matches would look like now that we had more people.

Liana looked in Ellen's direction to ask her something.

"By the way, Ellen, will you take part in the tournament?"

"Tournament?"

As it was a festival, there wasn't only the battle between elites, but there were also battle events open to all of Temple's students. The biggest among them was the tournament divided by grades.

Mainly those who specialized in close-quarter combat would participate.

In the original, Ellen would compete in the tournament, where she would win in her first year.

Ellen's opponent in the finale was Orbis Class's strongest first year—the one who immediately caused Ludwig to get kicked out of the tournament. Ellen would barely

beat him.

That sequence would also serve as a moment to show that Ellen would be Ludwig's wall to overcome, like that one time on the deserted island.

Of course…

The ratings were utterly disastrous.

The readers were probably bored of that martial arts tournament arc. It was a popular pattern, after all.

Fight and win, fight and win.

Ah, I'm just going to skip this arc. Where does it actually end?

I got a lot of those kinds of comments.

So after I wrote that arc, I had to take a sedative because of all those malicious comments…

That fucking boring part was slowly approaching me in reality.

"…Well."

However, Ellen's reactions seemed to be a little negative. Originally, she would have just participated and won, but things seemed to be a little different.

After some time, Ellen shook her head.

"I don't think I'm going to participate."

"Why? Honestly, I think you'd easily win first place."

I knew why things had turned out like that.

"Just because… I don't think there's any reason for me to participate."

Ellen had learned how to strengthen herself with magical power.

Ellen seemed to think that there was no reason for her to participate in something like that at that point because the difference between her skills and her classmates' was already overwhelming.

I put my hand on Ellen's shoulder.

"Yeah, that's probably a good idea. Don't participate."

"?"

I grinned at Ellen.

"If you participate, I wouldn't be able to win first place."

My sudden declaration made the others widen their eyes.

"…Even without me there, I don't think you'd be able to win."

"…Isn't that a bit too much?"

At Ellen's sudden words, everyone burst into laughter.

My sudden declaration that I would participate in the tournament and Ellen's contemptful comment seemed to have caused great joy for the others.

'Did you guys have to laugh at the expense of a man's suffering? What a bunch of cruel bastards.'

"Why won't I be able to win?!"

"…Do I have to tell you?"

I tried hard to get along with her, but Ellen just stared at me as she drank the rest of her wine.

"You're no match for Cliffman. What if he decides to participate?"

"…Right."

Ah.

I couldn't say anything against those facts. Even with my supernatural power activated, I couldn't defeat Cliffman. Although my skills had improved a bit during the vacation, Cliffman probably wouldn't have just sat around doing nothing either.

I couldn't beat Cliffman.

Then, if there were some talented guy among the participants who could actually beat Cliffman, that would mean I wouldn't be able to get past that person either.

"Hmm, Fine then. I'll just go and break the legs of all the ones of the Royal Class and Orbis Class who are stronger than me, and then I'll participate."

"…It feels like you'd really pull something like that, so how about not saying that out loud?"

Liana looked at me at my remark. Harriet also commented.

"…How are you going to break the legs of those who are stronger than you to begin with?"

"By surprise attacking them?"

"Are… are you really going to do that?"

Harriet's face blanched as if I might actually try to put that bullshit plan into action.

"Dunno. I was just joking because I got annoyed."

I was just joking. I also didn't think that I'd be able to land first place just because Ellen wasn't there—that was also meant to be a joke.

I didn't even think about participating in that tournament.

Rather, it was a lot better to just spar with Ellen to improve my skills.

Starting from the second semester, I also planned to focus more on other tasks, so I didn't have any time to play around in that event.

Going to some festival?

Some martial arts tournament? I wouldn't participate.

Some clash between classes? I'd just be absent.

I was living on borrowed time.

I couldn't just live like a real student.

"Still, participate."

But then, all of a sudden, Ellen said those nonsensical things.

"What? Didn't you say I wouldn't get first place, though?"

What was she talking about? First, she told me that I wasn't good at fighting, and then she wanted me to participate in something like that?

"Just curious."

Ellen was staring at me. Was she curious about my skills? She should have witnessed the extent of them to some degree while we were in the Darklands.

In the original story, Ellen would participate in the tournament and win the whole thing.

However, Ellen had become incomparably stronger than how she was in the novel, so she decided to not take part in the Temple tournament, as the results were more than obvious.

She wouldn't participate herself.

"You have to make it to the quarterfinals."

So Ellen seemed to wonder how far I would be able to go after learning swordsmanship from her.

She wanted her student to participate, not herself, and she wanted to watch.

"…Are you drunk?"

Suddenly, Ellen's expression became strange, as if she was trying to pretend that things were normal. She wasn't actually that kind of person, but she still said that I had to reach the quarterfinals after learning from her.

Looking closely, not knowing if it was because of the yellow light illuminating the room, that girl's face looked really red.

"If you can't make it until there, I'll scold you."

It was oddly difficult to look at that strange smile dancing around her lips.

It would have been better if she had just gotten into a drunken frenzy or fallen asleep. After seeing her act like that, my whole body felt as if it froze over.

CHAPTER 178

Ellen didn't seem to be completely drunk but only slightly tipsy. It wasn't only her; everyone seemed to be a little drunk.

Both Adelia and Harriet, while tipsy, were excitedly chatting away about something.

"So, why don't we just make some trigger-type magical weapon?"

"Tha-that would be too difficult for us…"

"Okay, okay, let's do it. We can ask for the components from Temple, and if they don't have something, I'll get it!"

"Re-really…? I-I'm sorry to burden you…"

It seemed like they were rambling on about the ideas that were floating through their heads.

Ellen sat on the sofa, hugging her knees.

I figured it out.

She was the type to start acting all cute when she got drunk. She was looking at me with her chin propped up on her knees.

"I'm hungry."

"Eat this."

"…Not this."

It seemed that the cheese and chocolate weren't enough.

Her expression showed that she wanted me to cook something for her.

"Well… I don't think there are any other snacks around here."

Liana thought about preparing something else to eat when Ellen said that she was hungry. However, it seemed like she couldn't think of anything. Heinrich was just drinking without saying a word.

That guy. He really was no good.

I was a bit concerned about Heinrich, but it was Ellen who mattered.

She looked like she was planning on holding her breath until I made her something.

At least, that was what her continued stare made me believe she was planning.

"Haah, aren't you creative today…?"

Eventually, I looked at Liana.

"Do you have any ingredients around here?"

"Probably?"

Liana said that there was only one way to find out.

" Are you going to cook?"

"Dunno, I'll just throw something together."

"Didn't you drink?"

"I'm fine. I'm not that drunk. Arg!"

As I said that, I slightly twisted my foot while trying to get up from the sofa.

"Hey, hey, I'll come with you."

Liana followed me out of the room, thinking I was drunk.

"I'm not drunk, okay?"

"…Do you know where the kitchen is?"

“…I know.”

The place was a mansion—a place I would absolutely get lost in if I wasn’t told where the kitchen was.

Was I actually drunk?

* * *

The kitchen Liana guided me to had a food pantry filled with ingredients. I took some random things out.

Liana was watching me with an anxious expression on her face.

“Do you know how to cook?”

"Although I’m not confident that I can satisfy the refined taste buds of our esteemed young lady, I can whip up something that would satiate that bottomless hole back there at least.”

“Are you actually trying to make me mad?”

I didn’t plan on making snacks that would go well with alcohol. My purpose was to satisfy that hungry carnivore.

“Be careful with the knife.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

I cut some sausages into bite-sized pieces and chopped some onions, bell peppers, and mushrooms; then, I put everything in a frying pan. I added some ketchup, sugar, pepper, and a pinch of salt.

It didn’t really take that long to make either. Luana looked down at the almost instantly finished dish and tilted her head.

“What is this?”

“Sausage stir-fried with some vegetables, then mixed with ketchup, sugar, and pepper.”

“I was asking for the name of the dish, not how you made it.”

Would she understand if I told her it was called “Soyah”?

She should just leave it at that and eat it!

I made a huge amount, of course, because it was meant for Ellen. I also found some baguettes, so I sliced one up and put it in a bowl. Liana cautiously tried some of the food, then smirked.

“I can’t say it’s all that tasty, but… Surprisingly, It’s actually quite edible.”

“That’s what Harriet said last time as well:”

Both of them were used to luxurious food, so they wouldn’t be able to call that delicious, but it wasn’t bad. Then Liana looked at me and folded her arms.

“The more I get to know you, the weirder you get.”

“I get that a lot.”

Now that I thought about it, most people I had met actually told me that.

* * *

Everyone’s eyes widened when I returned with the bowl of sliced baguette and sausage-vegetable stir-fry.

Ellen, of course, just started shoving the sausage vegetable stir-fry into her mouth with a fork without even saying a single word. Liana also ate a little of the food placed before her.

Adelia’s eyes widened as she ate.

“Reinhardt, you’re… surprisingly good at a lot of things…”

“Ah, thanks.”

Her face was pretty much flushed, as she was slightly drunk as well.

“At first, I just… thought you were someone very scary… But now, I don’t think so anymore…”

That girl who couldn’t even look me in the eyes when she talked to me while sober was speaking quite frankly when she was drunk. Liana nodded her head quietly.

“That’s true. Honestly, you looked like a completely different person to me during our group mission last time.”

Everyone had nearly given up during the group mission, but Ellen and I had decided to move first.

Honestly, though, it was Bertus who led all the kids, but I did end up giving him a lot of advice.

“Y-yes, back then… he was a little… cool… right?”

"Ah… Huh? Uhm, erm… Well, I-I don’t really…?”

Adelia looked towards Harriet to ask for her confirmation, leading to Harriet just shaking her head in embarrassment.

To tell the truth, I felt that my classmates’ opinions of me had greatly changed since that time. Liana looked towards me and smiled softly.

“We only have to fix that guy’s crooked personality…”

“God damn it.”

-Bang!

At that moment, a quiet swear broke the mood.

The atmosphere instantly froze over as if water had been thrown over it.

“You keep yapping on about Reinhardt this, Reinhardt that. What’s so good about him?”

Heinrich von Schwarz, with his eyes half-open, muttered vacantly as he roughly placed his glass down.

That bastard was…

Completely drunk.

“What’s so good about that lowborn guy with a terrible temper, who punches every person he comes across, doesn’t know his place, and just keeps on talking casually with nobles and royalty, whom he normally wouldn’t even be able to look at!”

Adelia shuddered as that idiot started yelling. Ellen began staring at Heinrich, and Liana furrowed her brows. Harriet seemed perplexed.

Wow, that punk.

I kind of felt that things were piling up on him in that situation, but I didn’t think he would explode like that.

“Hey, shut up.”

I looked at him and said some brief words.

“If you talk more, you’ll regret it tomorrow.”

To be honest, if I wanted Heinrich to completely fuck himself over, I could have just kept on sitting there without saying a word.

He was completely self-destructing. Leaving him alone would make him suffer the most once morning came.

So to tell him to shut up was the limit to the mercy I was willing to give that guy. That was my limit.

It was clear that my judgment had been twisted in some ways on that trip, so I wouldn’t really react much, even when he tried to badmouth me.

However, it seemed like my words only added fuel to the fire.

“…Who the hell are you to talk to me, part of Kernstadt’s Royal Family, like that? Do you still think this is Temple, you bastard? Just because you got into Temple, do you think you’ve become a great noble or royalty? Do you think you’ve become something better because you take the same classes as the Prince and Princess…?”

“Hey, stop.”

Liana de Grantz placed her head on Heinrich’s knee. His body was trembling terribly after he heard Liana’s words.

“Why are you being like this all of a sudden? If you’re drunk, just go and sleep.”

“…”

That was probably the last thing he wanted to hear from Liana. If one treated a drunk person as a drunk person, that would be the same as pressing their detonate button.

If you’re drunk, just go to sleep. Don’t act like some gangster.

Hearing something like that from the person one liked would make one all the more angry as well.

“Hey, who do you think you are?”

He looked at me as he said that.

“This bastard. You’ve been kicking up a fuss about going to the Darklands this time around, and you’ve been acting all high and mighty, but then you just came back telling us that you just wandered around in some safe places, not doing anything at all. Can that even be called an adventure? Isn’t that just a picnic? What’s even the difference between playing around here then?”

There were a lot of things that he seemed to have kept bottled up.

I was rather tired, so I didn’t have the energy to get angry. Dealing with that was just tiring, and if I actually got angry at a drunk person, it would be my loss.

It would just seem pathetic in that situation.

I had seriously endured enough.

And I didn’t particularly like or dislike Heinrich von Schwarz.

Did I seriously have to take care of the person who was bad-mouthing me like that?

There was only one thing I needed to do while he was being so obnoxious.

—Just sit still. He would soon dig his own grave.

I just had to leave him alone.

The best thing that could happen to him was if I actually slapped him. Why would I even hit him when that would just end up biting me in the ass?

I was just going to stay put.

That would be the worst thing for Heinrich.

“Hey. I told you to stop…”

“Wait a sec. You’re nothing more than a bully in Temple who just one-sidedly attacks the ones weaker than you. Are you scared to do it in a place like this? What’s the matter? Huh? You coward.”

He was just pointing his finger at me without even listening to Liana’s advising words.

“Hey, what’s the matter? Are you going to punch me? Like always? A guy like you who can only be strong against the weak probably couldn’t even do much in the Darklands. Just fucking hit me. It’ll be as easy as befo—”

“Hey.”

It was neither Liana nor I who cut off Heinrich’s words.

“If you talk any more…”

Ellen was gazing at Heinrich with cold eyes, picking up a whiskey bottle.

“I’ll kill you.”

She was about to strike Heinrich’s head with that thing.

* * *

At Ellen's harsh remarks, the atmosphere that had already turned cold froze over even more. I took the whiskey bottle from Ellen's hands.

"Hey, girl. Calm down. Why are you like this all of a sudden?"

Ellen glared at the frozen stiff Heinrich with a deathly look in her eyes.

"Don't open your mouth when you don't know a thing."

"What? What do you mean by, "you don't know a thing"…?"

"Don't talk like you don't even know that."

Just as Heinrich completely lost his mind, so had Ellen. Her anger had erupted when she heard Heinrich insulting me for being a coward and wimp when she was already in a really unstable mindset due to stress.

Although those weren't memories we were proud of, we had never acted cowardly. However, that wasn't something one could easily shake off just by falling for that obvious provocation.

Heinrich paused for a moment, his face flushed red in embarrassment as I stopped Ellen from hurting him, then his attitude changed all of a sudden.

"…Ah, you went to the Darklands together, right?"

Heinrich smiled at Ellen as if he had just remembered that fact.

It was an obvious sneer.

"Didn't you also get cold feet when you got there? Why? Do you feel embarrassed and ashamed that I pointed that out?"

"Stop it, you! Why do you keep going?!"

"Tha… That. Why are you doing this, Heinrich?"

Even Harriet and Adelia told him to stop, but he seemed unwilling to listen to them.

"Siigh…"

Liana de Grantz's expression turned freezing cold.

"How annoying."

-*Brrzzzzt!*

"Kurk!"

Lightning left Liana's body and struck Heinrich. In the end, her patience ran out, so she took things into her own hands.

"…If I knew that he would act like that, I wouldn't have brought him here."

Liana was staring at Heinrich, who was almost immediately knocked out by her lightning bolt, lying there squished like some insect. After she put out the sudden disturbance in a flash, she just went back to sipping on her whisky.

"It's okay. He isn't dead."

Her saying that so casually sure was scarier, though.

Anyway, Heinrich had done something he shouldn't have done out of jealousy and some sense of rivalry with me, so he was firmly embedded as an annoyance in Liana de Grantz's mind.

Maybe I should have hit him earlier. Of course, there was no reason for me to do him that favor when he was deliberately trying to piss me off.

Anyway, a lot of my personality had mellowed out completely. If it was some time ago, I would have flown at him at the drop of a bead, no questions asked.

Of course, that was when my position was still unstable and when I didn't have any other choice but to do that to not get ignored. I had no reason to care for something like that anymore. I didn't even want to get angry over some drunk's ramblings.

Leaving him to his own devices was the biggest punishment for that drunkard, so I just sat back.

So, like that, he received retaliation without me even having to lift a finger.

I felt rather good because I got to drink some alcohol after a long time, so I didn't really want to get upset.

Having fainted, Heinrich was placed on the bed in his room. After something like that happened, it felt like it was about time that we left, but Liana seemed to have other intentions.

"By the way, you two."

She looked between Ellen and me alternately. Ellen was still upset at Heinrich's obnoxious words.

"I didn't believe even for a second that nothing happened in the Darklands…"

Liana seemed to have realized something after hearing Ellen's outburst to not talk without knowing anything.

And she didn't actually believe our words that nothing happened.

"Seeing that it's something you don't want to talk about but react to when you hear the word coward or something… I have a rough idea of what might have happened."

Liana looked at us after she took a sip of her whiskey.

"…"

"…"

Liana seemed to have guessed to some extent why we were unable to speak about that.

"You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to."

She poured wine into Ellen's glass and whiskey into mine.

"However, whatever you ended up doing, I think there must have been an unavoidable reason for your actions."

"…"

No matter what you did, there must have been a good reason for it.

That was what Liana said.

"You might be wondering why I'm so curious about this."

Liana raised her glass with a smile.

"Because we're friends. That's why."

Friends.

Liana de Grantz thought of Ellen and me as friends. I didn't expect such words to come out of her mouth, so I couldn't help but feel a little dazed.

The relationship between us wasn't that long. We also didn't really talk much.

But people didn't have to know each other for a very long time to become friends. After she drank a bit, Liana seemed to be a lot more honest and talkative than usual.

That was why she was acting like that and telling us that we were friends, which was why she was so curious about it.

She was the complete opposite of Heinrich, who only talked about his status and asked me if I still thought I was in Temple when he got drunk.

No matter our status, we can be friends. I think of you as my friends.

Ellen was quietly staring at Liana, seemingly slightly startled by her words.

Then she looked at me.

I knew what that gaze meant.

Can I tell them?

It seemed like she didn't tell them anything before because she was worried that everyone would just be afraid of her and shun her.

However, continuing to hide those things even after Liana said those words would be

rude to her, as well as Harriet and Adelia.

It looked like she didn't want to hide it anymore in front of those people who definitely could understand her.

I gazed into Ellen's eyes and nodded slightly. She took a few deep breaths for some time. She was already pretty drunk.

"We killed people."

Ellen continued to speak in a calm but slightly trembling voice.

With the exception of Liana, Adelia and Harriet both seemed to hold their breath in surprise.

"26 in total."

Unlike me, Ellen could even remember the exact number of people we killed.

* * *

Ellen calmly continued her recounting. Slowly, from the beginning. Everyone listened to how our journey through the Darklands went with bated breath.

—How we noticed and preemptively stopped a robbery attempt on us while we were traveling from Exian to St. Point.

—How we made a wizard join us in St. Point.

—The conflict we had with a B-ranked adventurer called Hugson.

—How we chose between going to Als Point ourselves and joining the Convoy mission.

—How we ended up choosing to take a look ourselves and went south.

—The massacre in Klitz Point as well as the annihilation of the bandits there.

—Our return to St. Point and how we found out that Hugson was their accomplice, leading to his arrest.

—How we were asked by an investigator of the Adventurers' Guild Headquarters to return to Als Point.

—The disappearance of all the corpses in Klitz Point, how they came back to life as zombies and attacked us.

—The mysterious case of Als Point, caused by a cursed sword.

—And the battle between us and the cursed sword along with the zombies it controlled.

Ellen didn't reveal anything about the "true identity" of Relya, the suspicious wizard.

Then she told them that, after all those battles, she finally realized how to use magic strengthening and how we recovered the cursed sword and left it with Temple.

After having listened to the whole story, the three of them had dazed expressions on their faces.

"Too many people had died, and we even killed some ourselves. I just thought that it wasn't anything pleasant to listen to, so I couldn't bring myself to tell you."

Ellen then looked at Harriet.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you."

She apologized to her for not telling her anything. Harriet bit her lip and shook her head.

"No… No. It's okay. I think… I think I can understand why you couldn't say anything. I… I'm sorry. I didn't know… That something like that happened to you…"

After Harriet heard the whole story, she was more than convinced that we had reasons enough for not telling her. Rather, she actually ended up apologizing to Ellen.

With that, even the last bit of enmity between them seemed to have melted away.

"…It must have been hard for the two of you. You did well."

That was what Liana told us. Her words were short, but she seemed to have

understood how we felt. Rather than just understanding, she even thought what we did was good.

"…It's scary… It's very, very scary, but… Both of you did great. If it were me… I wouldn't have been able to do anything. I… I! You two. I think you did really well! I think you did what you had to do! And thinking that you fought without even thinking of running away… Is so amazing… So… don't feel so sad. Yes."

Adelia seemed slightly frightened but confirmed Liana's words that both of us did great, seeming as if she was squeezing out every last bit of courage in her.

Harriet looked between Ellen and me.

"Both of you… saved so many people."

We thought that the kids would be afraid of us or distance themselves from us after hearing what we did.

"I mean… It's not something one should brag about, but… I think you can be proud of yourselves. I don't want you to suffer from this."

That whole thing was our misunderstanding.

"…Thank you."

Ellen drank her wine with a warm smile tugging on her lips.

It felt like that shadow that seemed to have been cast over Ellen's face after we returned from the Darklands had finally disappeared.

CHAPTER 179

The next day…

Naturally, Heinrich von Schwarz, who had been completely drunk, said that he didn't remember anything from the previous night.

However, it seemed like he was the only one who had some missing memories, meaning everyone remembered what happened.

Ellen seemed to have said to Heinrich that she 'doesn't like him'.

Harriet seemed to think that he was 'pathetic'.

Adelia seemed to have said that she "Doesn't really like him…", but it was clear that what she felt on the inside was 'extreme hatred' towards him for what he had done.

The most important was Liana de Grantz.

"…Why should I apologize to him?"

"Just do what I tell you to do."

"…But I don't remember anything."

"Then go tell him you're sorry for not remembering anything."

Of course, one of the servants seemed to have scolded Liana a bit. The smell of alcohol was wafting from all of us, so there was no way that they didn't know.

Anyway, during lunch, Heinrich was arguing that he shouldn't have to suddenly apologize for something he didn't even remember. He had no idea what was going on.

"Fine. What's even the point of such an apology? How could he sincerely apologize for something he doesn't remember?"

"…"

Heinrich frowned at my words that were telling him it wasn't necessary for him to apologize.

It was so easy to screw that guy over. The more he showed off his uglier side, the more he would only destroy himself.

Liana looked at me with round eyes.

"Huh, did Reinhardt mature? You can even tolerate things like that now?"

"It's not like I can keep acting childish like a certain someone, right?"

"…Are you talking about me?"

At Heinrich's words, I just smirked as I ate some bacon.

"Why do you think so? Do you feel guilty about something?"

"How about we settle this now?"

Heinrich seemed pretty confident about his skills because he had improved a bit, it was the same as before when he was completely drunk.

We probably needed to sort it out at some point.

"Hey."

"What?"

I took a fork and stabbed it into a marbled steak.

"After eating this, how about we go out for a bit to talk? Just the two of us."

I had been patient once or twice.

I didn't really feel like it, but I still thought that I should clean that mess, up after all.

* * *

I used to use rough words. I used to talk in confusing ways that were akin to poking the kids' eyes.

However, my calm words that I wanted to talk to someone felt like a serious warning sign, so the others tried to stop me.

"I'm just going to talk."

Heinrich seemed to be confident in whatever he had learned, and after I finally shook everyone off, I left the mansion with Heinrich.

I went around the mansion, to a place where no one could see us, and then I faced Heinrich.

I had let that guy do whatever he wanted once or twice, badmouthing me and whatnot.

"What? You want to try me? If you want to come, then come."

Heinrich didn't seem to be afraid. It looked like he had gained tremendous confidence in his improved ability, and he seemed to think that I wasn't anything big anymore because I had just bummed around in the Darklands.

"…Don't you know that I'm being very considerate towards you?"

"What?"

It was more than clear that I didn't really care for that brat, even when he accused me of things and bragged about being a noble, mostly because I had other things to worry about.

However, if one looked at it from a different perspective, I was acting very considerate towards that guy to the point of actually leaving him be.

"Anyway, seeing that you're so confident, let's do it then."

As if he had been waiting for these words, he looked at me with shining eyes.

"You might die, you know? I can't control my strength properly, after all."

He felt confident that he'd be able to immediately bake me by just moving his hand. I sighed at him.

Unlike punching, Pyrokinesis wasn't something that could be used in an actual practice match.

He seemed very excited at the thought of finally paying me back for the humiliation he had suffered in the first semester.

"I'll show you today that I'm not the same as before."

"Sigh…"

That guy focused his mind.

"You fucking punk."

-*Fizz*!

As I strengthened my body, I ran towards him while he was preoccupied with focusing.

-*Baang!*

I strongly kneed him in his stomach.

"Kuh… Urg!"

"Did you think I just played around?"

Why did that bastard think he grew stronger through?

"Kuh… Kuhuk! Huk! Huk!"

He collapsed to the floor as I looked down on that disgusting idiot. He had already lost his concentration.

A kick to the abdomen…

That was the end of it. There wasn't some flashy fight between supernatural power

users.

There was just too big a gap between our levels—a gap between our basic physical abilities.

“Just like you’re not on the same level as a flint anymore, I’m not the man I used to be either.”

I stood before him until he came back to his senses again as he crouched there.

That guy who used to take about five seconds to focus his mind in order to create fire seemed to have reduced that time to about one second.

But a second was still pretty long—it was enough time for me to tear him apart, so I couldn’t possibly lose to Heinrich von Schwarz.

As things were, I could have crushed him and squeezed the life out of him in his exhausted state, but I didn’t go that far. He staggered away from me and stared at me with a confused expression on his face.

We had been quite the distance away from each other, and yet he hadn’t even seen me approaching him.

His supernatural power had gotten stronger, but I had gotten stronger as well.

Even I didn't think things would turn out like that. It was just one knee kick. He couldn’t even avoid it.

“If the others had seen this sight, how shameful would that have been?”

“…”

I purposely did it in a place with no one around. If I had beaten him in front of the others, that surely would have been utterly humiliating. If I wanted to trample over his pride, I could have done that at any time.

However, I had kept it in, so I told Heinrich von Schwarz that I was being considerate towards him.

“This is the last time I’ll protect your pride.”

"…"

"And don't try to build some kind of rivalry with me. I'm not interested in Grantz at all. Why are you so mad at me?"

"Wh-what?!"

He seemed to feel greatly embarrassed when I said those things out of the blue. It looked like he didn't think I'd know that he was interested in Liana de Grantz.

"Wh-wh-whaaat do you mean? Wh-what are you talking about?"

"…Dude, just looking at you fidgeting about is enough to figure that out. Who'd believe you if you denied it, hm?"

"N-no. It's not like that, okay? Not at all, you know?"

"Really? Then why do you always look so upset when Grantz talks to me?"

"Th-that's… That's!"

He was stuttering with a completely flushed face. That bastard, even that arrogant, rude, idiot of a royal was ashamed of those sorts of things. He was still just a little kid.

"Well. Anyway, I'm not interested in her, so stop trying to mess with me. If you don't stop, don't blame me for trampling over you before the others. I'm only willing to let these things go once or twice, ya hear?"

I spoke those words in a low voice as I passed him.

"And when you get back, apologize to the kids. If you don't do that, things will only get worse for you."

He didn't bother me anymore after that.

* * *

I reluctantly blessed Heinrich, who thought he had grown a bit stronger, with some "True Education".

I could have handled that a lot more violently, but I didn't.

In the first place, we were classmates, so we should look out for each other a bit. I knew I couldn't get along with everyone, but I sure didn't want to make all of them enemies. In the first half of the semester, I had acted a bit over the top because I didn't want to get ignored, but I didn't have to do that anymore.

It wouldn't do me any good if I got on the bad side of my classmates to the point where they would end up stabbing me in the back.

Of course, that didn't mean that I saw Heinrich as any less of a bastard to the point that I wanted to help him in any way.

"Well, I'm sorry, everyone… I was a little, a little rash."

Heinrich apologized for ruining the mood previously before Liana and the others as soon as he returned to the mansion.

He didn't remember what had happened the day before, but he believed that he made a mistake and he added that he was sorry.

The others had no idea what I did to make Heinrich apologize all of a sudden. They couldn't see any obvious injuries, so it didn't seem like I had hit him.

"It's fine. Just don't do it again."

"Ah, yes…"

Liana seemed to be trying to wrap the whole situation up. After saying that, she looked at me and Heinrich alternately.

"By the way, you two didn't fight, right?"

"…"

"W-well…"

Heinrich seemed a little hesitant, then smiled awkwardly, hunched his back, and

scratched his head a bit.

“It wasn’t like that, while we were talking, I just realized… That I made a mistake.”

I didn’t think Heinrich would say something like that, so I, along with everyone else, was a little stunned.

Heinrich realized that he was no match for me.

I could have beaten him up in front of everyone, but didn’t. I had only called him to a remote place so that he could confirm the gap between our skill levels.

Would he still resent me for beating him up, or did he actually realize that I was being pretty considerate?

Well, he didn’t seem to appreciate it too much, because, in the end, I had still hit him suddenly.

However, it didn’t seem that he really hated me.

He seemed to have noticed that I really limited myself a lot and that it wasn’t for my sake but his.

Liana felt the subtle atmosphere around us and smiled.

“Great. Then should we have a drink for your reconciliation today?”

“…What?”

“Be careful, Heinrich, if you drink too much again like yesterday, I’ll knock you out again.”

That crazy alcoholic. She wanted to drink again?

Did she reach the level that she was using every little thing as an excuse to drink?

“Kn-knock… You knocked me out yesterday?”

Heinrich’s face grew pale because he had just found out that he didn’t simply forget what happened and passed out but that Liana actually made him faint.

* * *

So far, Heinrich had been feeling a little out of place.

To be exact, he was so conscious of me that he wasn't able to play around properly.

He was only paying attention to what I was up to.

When I hit him, he seemed to have come to his senses and noticed that I was stronger than he thought. When I told him that I wasn't interested in Liana in the least, he also seemed to be able to act more comfortably as well.

Of course, it would be hard to revert that bad image the others had of him.

Anyway, Heinrich didn't try to mess with me anymore. Of course, I felt like he was looking at me with different eyes, but I wasn't that concerned about that.

In the end, Heinrich was able to fit in with the others much better because he cared less about me.

Liana, the owner of the mansion, said all was well, so nobody showed any dissatisfaction on the outside, although they still felt a bit skeptical. Ellen, well, she always had a neutral expression, so she didn't really show anything either.

And I found out another trait of Liana's that I had no prior knowledge about:

She was a heavy drinker.

In the end, we gathered up that night as well to drink under the pretext of celebrating our reconciliation. Heinrich didn't just drink his alcohol alone in the corner like before but chatted with us about this and that.

The situation was completely different.

"You looked down on people with a normal background…"

"I… I did?"

“Yesh… Hei-heinrich, I know that you’re from a very big royal family, but… Hearing what you said… made me really sad…”

When Adelia got drunk, she told Heinrich what he had said before and made a fuss about it.

It’s not like I’m calling you a jerk, but what you said to Reinhardt hurt me as well, so I got sad.

—It was a variation of that.

"Th-that… I-I did that…? I’m… I’m sorry, Adelia.”

When Heinrich heard how much alcohol he had been drinking and what he had said, his face turned completely red. He didn’t know what to do.

He seemed to understand why Liana wanted him to apologize.

“But Reinhardt sure was amazing yesterday. Normally, he should have punched you black and blue in that situation, but he kept holding it in.”

At Liana’s words, he continued to stare at me—even while he was apologizing to Adelia. He didn’t seem to be able to believe it. Judging by the quick temper I had shown up until then, I should have let my fists fly immediately after hearing what he had said, but I had kept holding it in.

Of course, I had only stayed still because that was the quickest way to screw that guy over.

However, Heinrich seemed to realize how much consideration I had given him.

Even though he had said things like that, I hadn’t punched him.

He realized that I really had been holding it in a lot.

“Ah, erm… I’m sorry, Reinhardt.”

Eventually, he even apologized to me.

“As long as you know it.”

I wasn't that picky, after all.

Of course, no one told him that Ellen had actually tried to kill Heinrich or what had really happened in the Darklands.

Fortunately, no one got so drunk that they ended up making a scene that day. Before that happened again, Liana would knock them out cold.

Before I went to bed, I walked to the beach in the middle of the night to cool off my head.

It was similar to the one on the uninhabited island, and yet a little different. Just as I sat down on the beach, someone came to sit next to me.

"Aren't you sleeping?"

"In a little while… I will."

Ellen sat down next to me as if it was natural.

And then, again, as if it was natural, she placed her head on my shoulder. I was used to that by then.

For a while, we just stared blankly at the waves crashing on the beach over and over.

"Are you feeling better now?"

"…Yes."

I felt relieved that some of her pain could be lifted by confiding in the other kids.

"I didn't have nightmares yesterday."

"It could be because of the alcohol."

"…Is that so?"

"Alcohol or not, I'm glad that you didn't have any nightmares."

I didn't care whether it was because she drank too much or because had she told the others. Ellen hadn't suffered from the nightmares that had been torturing her for all that time.

Maybe because she had drunk quite a bit of alcohol, I could feel Ellen's breathing become a little softer. Just how tired was she?

"…Are you sleeping?"

"…"

"No, you can't sleep like this."

Ellen suddenly fell asleep while leaning on my shoulder.

* * *

Harriet was getting ready to go to sleep in her room.

She felt dizzy, probably because she was drunk, so she felt like she'd immediately fall asleep if she lay down anywhere.

After she changed into her pajamas, she went to close the curtains in front of the window because the moonlight shining through it was too bright.

One had a good view of the beach through said window; it was an absolutely beautiful sight. Although it didn't look much different from what they had seen on the uninhabited island, they were in a much calmer environment.

She didn't have to worry about the heat, staying hydrated, and surviving—unlike on that deserted island—so she was able to purely enjoy the scenery with a clean smile on her face.

But Harriet didn't actually dislike her memories of that time.

She should have hated them, in fact, they should have been the worst memories of her life, but she thought they weren't necessarily all that bad.

Harriet looked out of the window into the night. She saw someone walking towards the beach, quietly sitting down, and starting to gaze upon the sea.

'Reinhardt… '

She could tell that it was Reinhardt just by seeing his back. Was he unable to sleep? Should she also go out and talk to him a bit?

Harriet stood before the window, pondering for a moment.

However, after some time, she could see another person heading onto the beach.

It was Ellen.

She sat down beside Reinhardt as if it was natural and placed her head on Reinhardt's shoulder.

Reinhardt didn't react as if he was familiar with that.

She didn't know what they were talking about.

But she knew…

The fact that those two were very close. And after going through such terrible experiences, she knew that it was only natural that they grew to rely on each other, hence growing even closer to each other.

It was inevitable.

Seeing Ellen get angry on Reinhardt's behalf as if it was her who had been insulted, she had already noticed that their relationship had undergone a slight change.

She knew, but it was still painful to see it happening before her own eyes.

-Charaan!

Harriet couldn't bear to watch that scene any longer, so she closed the curtains.

If she had gone with them, things would have been different.

Harriet felt miserable.

Her memories of the uninhabited island should have been the worst, but they weren't.

She wished to make her best memories in that mansion.

…But she couldn't seem to accomplish that.

CHAPTER 180

If I hadn't beaten him down, Liana would have hated Heinrich a lot more. Needless to say, he would have held an even deeper grudge against me. After having beaten him up, I should have finally been able to rest, but we would soon return to our life at Temple.

I didn't stop by Airi's pub in Rajak after all. They seemed to be doing well without my interference, and I didn't really want to leave any clues by suddenly visiting that place I supposedly had no connection to.

After resting at Liana's mansion until Sunday, we returned to Temple.

"That was fun, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

Adelia recounted that she had made quite a lot of fond memories of playing around at the mansion, to which Harriet smiled and nodded. She seemed a bit down, though.

All of us who had been at Liana's mansion returned to Temple together.

Of course, other than us, most people had already returned to Temple, as our vacation had come to an end.

"Sigh… Even though I feel like haven't played enough yet, it's already over…"

The first thing I could see was Kono Lint hanging out in the lobby of Class A's dormitory.

The three idiot brothers had been reunited already.

"By the way, Erich, you… You've changed quite a bit."

"Oh. Really?"

Cayer looked at Erich de Lafaeri, who then smirked.

“I exercised a bit during the vacations.”

He pretended as if what he did wasn’t a big deal and slightly flexed his arm as if to say something like: “Although I’m not that kind of guy, I actually worked out during the vacations, you know?”

“I’m tired. I’ll go take a rest. All of you should, too.”

Liana said that she was tired and went to her room to rest. Although she had been playing around for the whole vacation, she was exhausted from the journey back, so she immediately went into her room, saying that we should also go rest.

“Good job.”

“…Huh? Ah, yeah.”

As if in passing, Heinrich left us these words as he made his way towards his own room as well.

It somehow felt like the bad blood between us had been subtly resolved, to some extent.

“Hey. It’s Reinhardt.”

“…?”

And Erich de Lafaeri, one of the three idiot brothers, who saw us coming back, looked at me and waved.

What? Why was he doing things he had never done before?

“Ah, yes."

“How have you been?”

"So, so."

“How was your visit to the Darklands?”

Why was that bastard pretending that we were friends?

"It was nothing much."

“Ah… What?”

Hearing my words, a strange smile crept up on his face. I somewhat knew where that guy’s confidence came from.

‘Does he think that he can take me on because he worked out a bit during the vacations?’

I thought I was done controlling those guys, but guess I wasn’t.

Heinrich wasn’t the only one.

It was the second semester.

It seemed like I would have to have a second go at those idiots who suddenly gained some unnecessary confidence.

Those losers kept trying to come at me for some reason.

Was that a villain’s fate or something?

* * *

Ellen seemed to have been cured of her nightmares. And since I said that we’d only be sharing our bed during the vacation, I would have kicked her out even if she came in.

In the end, our vacations ended as quickly as they started.

The second semester of our first year had started. There were some things that changed but also some that stayed the same.

For example, my early morning training with Adiana.

“Hey junior! Long time no see!”

“Yeah. You’re right.”

“I was so worried about you! I’m glad you’re okay!”

Adriana sincerely congratulated me for my safe return, blessing me with a very bright expression. When she asked me what happened in the Darklands, I gave her an appropriate answer. I did tell some of the kids, but in the end, I had still decided it wasn’t something I should brag about.

Of course, I also met the other people I saw around dawn: Ludwig, Ellen, Scarlett and Charlotte.

Everyone gave me a simple greeting as they passed by. Charlotte looked at me and gave me a strange smile as if she already knew everything that had happened.

“Reinhardt! Long time no see!”

“Ah, yeah.”

Ludwig had probably undergone ranger training during his vacation. His personality was still the same, but I felt like something changed about him, even if he pretended to be the same as before. One might say that some of his foolish parts had disappeared.

“Wasn’t it dangerous?”

“It was fine.”

“That’s a relief.”

It seemed almost mandatory for everyone to ask me and Ellen about how things went in the Darklands as soon as they saw us. That’s just how surprising it was.

I greeted the people I hadn’t seen in a long time and finally left the dormitory with Adriana.

“What did you do during the vacation?”

“Well, I trained my faith, so to speak. I did some volunteer work and prayed. I had a good time.”

It seemed that Adriana enjoyed her vacation. She got her satisfaction from helping others. There were times when I felt utter respect for her because she was so completely different from me.

“Wow, junior, you sure changed a lot. Well, you had a month of vacation, after all.”

“Whe-where are you touching me!”

I felt slightly embarrassed when Adriana was touching my forearm so casually. It seemed that my strength improvements were visible to the eye.

"O-oh? That’s… Ah. Erm. Sorry.”

Adriana’s face slightly reddened when she saw me so flustered and she apologized. We went through our early morning training for the first time in a month.

“Wow, you’ve grown so much. Did you keep at it in your free time during the vacations? I couldn’t do that.”

Of course, it had been a long time since I had last had my training with Adriana, so I had trained with Ellen in the meantime. Of course, I did nothing but play in the last week of vacation, though.

But I still couldn’t keep up with Adriana during our training, so I was completely exhausted towards the end.

“Haah… Haah…”

“Phew… You really did work hard. I’ll admit it.”

Of course, it was only natural that she was much stronger than me, so Adriana didn’t skimp on the compliments.

* * *

I couldn’t keep Adriana company until her stamina was drained, but she was a little exhausted by the time I dropped out, at least. After our morning training, we sat on a bench to rest for a bit.

“Phew… It sure feels nice to exercise again after such a long time.”

She seemed to feel good after working out, but although I kept doing it, I didn't think I'd ever felt that way before.

"Did you take a break from it until now?"

"Yeah, I was busy."

Praying and volunteering, it seemed that Adriana didn't have any time to exercise between those two things. Adriana then nodded her head and muttered something.

"…Actually, it was kind of hard."

"…What do you mean, 'it was hard'?"

"Well… I felt a bit lost. Something like that."

There was Olivia Lanze's case and also the disappointment she felt towards the Knights Templar. Adriana seemed to have been agonizing over whether she should continue believing in her faith or not.

So it looked like Adriana had a lot of worries haunting her during the vacation.

"However, I couldn't even tell whether my concern was really about faith itself or giving up on it… I couldn't readily come to a decision."

She didn't know whether she was contemplating her faith or thinking of giving it up.

I couldn't say I knew what Adriana meant by that.

"I think I know now."

Adriana looked at me and smiled.

"So, I'm not going to give up on it."

She thought about it and came to a decision. I couldn't sympathize with Adriana's agony, but it seemed like she eventually decided to not give up her faith.

I didn't really know what to make of that resolution, though.

Anyway, it seemed like Adriana found an answer to her worries that had been haunting her during the vacation.

* * *

I believe she had some complicated thoughts about everything, but she didn't elaborate on it, and I didn't really know what to say to that.

It felt refreshing to enter our classroom after such a long time. During my vacation, I had met the girls and Heinrich, but I hadn't seen Bertus, Cliffman, and the three idiot brothers for quite some time. Of course, I saw the three idiot brothers in passing the day before.

"It's been a while, Reinhardt."

Cliffman still greeted me quite awkwardly, albeit in a friendly manner, to which I nodded.

"Ah, yes. How have you been?"

"Fine. Right… How was it in the Darklands?"

"So-so, nothing really happened."

I answered the other's questions as I usually did, but as I did, I heard some laughter from behind me.

-Pfft.

-Pffffft.

-Why did he go there, then?

Those three idiot brothers.

They were laughing at me. Heinrich seemed to have been of the same opinion. They treated me as some kind of poser who made a big deal of going to the Darklands and returned with nothing to show.

‘Why the fuck are they cutting into their own flesh? Did they start itching all over now that a new semester started? Do they want me to beat them up again?’

“Reinhardt.”

“It’s been a while.”

I didn't really talk to Bertus about what happened. He just smiled softly at the people behind me who seemed to look down on me.

“Great job.”

“…”

It seemed like he already knew what Ellen and I went through during the vacation. I couldn’t really hide anything from him, so saying anything would have been meaningless, hence I just shrugged my shoulders.

-Ratter.

“Sit down.”

Then, Mr. Epinhauser entered the classroom.

“Today will mark the start of the second semester. The first point on the agenda is registering for your courses. Do submit your applications by today.”

Some of us had already done so, but I hadn’t yet, so I had to fill out my course application form by that day.

Mr. Epinhauser, as always, simply conveyed what he had to convey without any rhetorics.

“Except for the midterms and final exams, there are two other big events during your second semester: the group mission and the festival. A detailed schedule will be announced later. And in your first class today, there will be a physical scan.”

He was like a well-oiled machine, so he didn’t ask us how we had been or something similar.

I thought that he was done conveying his message, but then Mr. Epinhauser pulled something out of his pocket.

“Number A-2 and Number A-11, your new Adventurer IDs have arrived from the Adventurer’s Guild.”

New IDs.

Only then did I remember that they told us that they would upgrade Ellen’s and my adventurer rank when we left the Adventurer’s Guild. The new cards were to be sent to Temple. Everyone was puzzled when the talk was directed towards the Adventurers’ Guild.

—Except for the ones who knew what had happened.

Mr. Epinhauser simply looked at the ID cards and handed them to me and Ellen one after the other.

“They have been upgraded from F to B rank. That’s rather unusual. This just shows how serious the issue you two solved was. You can feel proud of yourselves.”

Mr. Epinhauser even gently patted Ellen and me on our shoulders, a rarity. He wasn’t someone who just did those kinds of things, so everyone including myself had their eyes opened wide.

He also asked us if we wanted to undergo psychological treatment because of what we went through—he thought that we might suffer from extreme guilt and trauma.

That was also why he tried to comfort us in a rather unusual way—in case we were still suffering from what we did.

You can be proud of your actions, don’t feel ashamed.

“Your additional reward has also arrived: one hundred gold coins each.”

An extraordinary rise in rank from F to B Rank.

Furthermore, 100 additional gold coins for each of us.

Everyone seemed even more surprised, except for those in the know. I had told everyone that nothing happened, but for some reason, our Adventurer Rank had dramatically risen.

There was a material reward as well.

—A huge amount of one hundred gold coins as an additional reward.

It was our remuneration for the annihilation of the bandits of Klitz Point and for solving that cursed sword case.

Everyone should have realized by then that I was lying when I had said that nothing happened and that we actually resolved quite an unusual situation.

Heinrich and the three idiot brothers in particular were immensely surprised. They had been looking down on me as someone who was all talk and just bummed around, but seeing how things had turned out, that was absolutely not the case.

It looked like I didn't actually have to dirty my hands again.

They'd simmer down on their own.

"And I have something to tell you about the item you have acquired. As such, please come to my private room along with Number two."

There was one more thing…

The cursed sword.

It seemed there was something he wanted to tell us about that item as well.

CHAPTER 181

We got a short break after that morning meeting.

Ellen and I went to Mr. Epinhausers private room, leaving our classmates, who were looking at us as if they were thinking things along the lines of 'What the hell did they do?', behind.

"After securing it in a safe space in which the sword's power cannot run rampant, several wizards are studying it."

It seemed that Temple was very thorough with their safety measures so that the sword's curse wouldn't affect anyone or anything else.

"First of all, for now, the sword belongs to you, but there is a possibility that your ownership might get revoked."

Mr. Epinhauser confirmed that I had ownership over the sword for the moment.

Temple was assessing the item for me.

However, there was only one reason why my ownership might get revoked:

The item was much too dangerous to be allowed to be held by an individual.

Understandable. It did destroy a whole village and turn the surrounding areas into a land where corpses turned into zombies.

However, that sword never actually appeared in the original.

If we hadn't solved the issue, someone else would have done it—it didn't have to be us. The cursed sword was dangerous, but we were able to deal with it on our own. If people with a much higher degree of skill than us dealt with that case, it would have been resolved easily.

Of course, there were a lot of complex conditions at work there, but I didn't think that it was an issue that no one but us could have solved.

We had just happened to take care of an issue that would have been resolved anyway just a bit earlier—that's what it felt like, at least.

"Currently, they are considering disposing of the item. I felt like I had to inform you two."

Disposal.

They were considering disposing of the sword because it was too dangerous. That would mean that the cursed sword would completely disappear from the fringes of the story.

"Did you find out what that sword is?"

At Ellen's question Mr. Epinhauser swept his hair back and folded his hands.

"No, not much has been elucidated yet except for the fact that a very unconventional curse was placed on it."

Eleris also said that, due to the nature of curses, nothing much could be found out about them.

—Because their cause and effect were very different from each other. However, Temple had come to the same conclusion.

Eleris's brief examination and Temple's detailed analysis led to the same conclusion in the end?

"One might judge that Temple's power is insufficient, but I am rather confident that this is not the case. Temple, as you may remember, has a curriculum centered around black magic, albeit limited. In other words, warlocks who have mastered the black arts serve as instructors in this institution."

I was aware of that. Black magic was seen as evil, but in the end, it was one of the most powerful magical systems of all time. So, although limited, Temple gave lectures on black magic as well.

So there naturally were people who could teach the subject—warlocks that served as instructors. Of course, the staff consisted of clean warlocks who hadn't caused any social controversy.

In fact, Class B's Anna de Gerna, someone with a talent for black magic, was calmly studying black magic in Temple.

Of course, there was a setting in place that the careers of black magic majors had to be clean, although they were seen as a minority in the world of magic. Because of that, warlocks preferred to stay hidden in the shadows sometimes.

It wasn't like Temple was ignorant of black magic.

They were even more knowledgeable about curses than Eleris.

However, even though they knew so much, they still couldn't find out what that cursed sword was.

"They say that the power sealed in the sword is too ancient for them to find out anything detailed about. In other words, the curse, and the ancient magic associated with it, aren't used in our current era anymore. Therefore, it's rather difficult to analyze it and near impossible to know what kind of power that curse might exert. Hence, currently, it has been evaluated that our best move would be to dispose of it as soon as possible after researching it properly."

Anyway, they had ultimately decided that the cursed sword was too suspicious and dangerous to allow me to use it.

"Of course, as we are essentially taking away something that belongs to you, depending on what is decided in the faculty meeting, you will be given an item that has been judged to be of considerable value, although we cannot be sure if its value will be similar to the sword. However, we can promise to provide you with a piece of equipment of at least A rank or higher."

Still, Temple took my situation into consideration as well, so it seemed like they were trying to appease me with another item.

But it was still disappointing.

I wasn't affected by the sword's curse to begin with, so I could use that sword without a problem. Of course, I couldn't be sure that nothing dangerous would happen just because I was holding it.

That cursed sword was even more ancient than I had initially thought.

However, in the end, they weren't able to identify its origins, so they would just discard it after they researched it.

An ancient item that even warlocks had no knowledge of…

Practical magic.

"…Teacher."

"Do you have something to tell me?"

I wasn't that greedy for that cursed sword. While it was a top-notch piece of equipment, if I were to receive an A-Rank piece of equipment, that would be like getting handed a treasure. I had no reason to refuse if they decided to give me something like that.

But it sure was a shame.

I was pretty sure that the sword was something much too good to just miss.

Even if they were going to throw it away, I wanted to first know what it was before it got discarded.

Ancient magic…

An old curse…

A practical skill…

"If it's ancient magic…"

One last possibility came to my mind.

"Sorcery… Could it be something like that?"

An ancient power that no one had information about, even inside of Temple, and therefore couldn't be taught to anyone.

Sorcery.

“So how about we ask Class B’s Dettomolian to analyze it just in case?”

I had a strong feeling that Class B’s sorcery talent, Dettomolian, might be able to figure out what that cursed sword was.

Or maybe not.

Mr. Epinhauser responded only lukewarmly to my suggestion that we should try to find out the sword’s origins using sorcery.

One could never know what would happen if one used an unknown power to probe something one had no information about.

He said that he would have a word with Mr. Mustrang and Dettomolian before he sent us back.

The hallway on our way back to the classroom.

“Do you really need that sword?”

Ellen still seemed apprehensive towards me keeping the sword. That was only natural, as it was cursed and ominous.

“It’s a waste to just throw it away without knowing what it is.”

“…”

Although I was able to use it, it would just get thrown away. Ellen still seemed unhappy but didn’t want to act too stubbornly.

* * *

As it was the start of the second semester, the physical scan intended to measure our physical data replaced our first class.

That’s right, it was just a physical examination. Of course, its focus was more on checking how much one’s physical abilities had improved than just making it a regular physical examination. After entering the measuring room, touching the

physical scanner, and undergoing some tests, each person's physical abilities were announced on a bulletin board.

Even during the semester, that information would be constantly updated, as those scans were a monthly occurrence.

A-11 Reinhardt

[Strength 8.3(C-)]

[Agility 8.5(C-)]

[Dexterity 9.6(C-)]

[Magical Power 12.8(C+)]

[Stamina 13(C+)]

Talents

[Self-Suggestion] [Magic Sensitivity]

My physical data had risen slightly ever since I returned from the Darklands. I had been about to enter the period in which my growth would slow down, but then I had received that trait from Ellen, Hero's blood, which allowed me to easily overcome that period.

It was an overall even improvement. If compared to my stats from the beginning of the first semester, it could be used as an ideal example of physical growth.

If I strengthened my body with Self-Suggestion, they might even go up to B-.

The rank of Self-Suggestion had also risen quite a bit, so the reinforcement it granted was quite substantial.

Thinking about the time when my physical abilities were still shown as F and D, I felt kind of nostalgic.

I was going to imprint my third talent soon.

Unless something big happened, it would be a talent related to magic.

“Erich! You’ve grown a lot, you punk!”

“Hmm… Is that so? I still have a long way ahead of me.”

Kono Lint hit Erich on his shoulder when he saw his updated physical data table. I did hear that he worked out during the vacation.

‘Let me check.’

A-9 Erich de Lafaeri

[Strength 10.2(C)]

[Agility 6.4(D)]

[Dexterity 5.40(D-)]

[Magical Power 4.10(F+)]

[Stamina 8(C-)]

[Divine Power -]

Talents

[Divine power] [Swordsmanship] [Martial Arts]

Did he just do some weight training?

That bastard wasn’t really interested in those kinds of things at first, so his old physical data wasn’t even good to begin with, but he had definitely improved.

His agility, dexterity, and stamina were too far behind his other stats. ‘Dude, you have to grow in a balanced manner.’

Still, Erich's strength was higher in rank than mine. Although his potential was overflowing, he never put any effort into anything, so I had no idea why that deadbeat decided to try now.

He had more talents than before, but he had neglected training his divine powers to the point that he didn't even get a rank for it.

"Hey, if you keep this up, won't you reach first place in no time?"

"Come on, how could that be?"

Erich shrugged his shoulders at the praise of his brothers, acting humble. 'Speaking of, what about Kono Lint?'

I was rather sure that his stats were freaking bad.

A-8 Kono Lint

[Strength 3.1(F)]

[Agility 7(D+)]

[Dexterity 5.1(D-)]

[Magical Power 1.4(F-)]

[Stamina 4(F+)]

Talents

[Teleportation]

Wow.

Even the words “freaking bad” weren’t enough to describe it.

Didn’t the physical training we had to do in our common classes show any results?

He wasn’t like Erich. That guy got put into the Royal Class purely because of his supernatural powers while having such abilities, right?

Kono Lint’s physical abilities weren’t even as good as mine in my first semester there.

No, I didn’t plan on looking at those pieces of garbage to begin with.

A-2 Ellen

[Strength 18.5(B+)]

[Agility 20.3(A-)]

[Dexterity 23.1(A)]

[Magical Power 27.2(A+)]

[Stamina 20.5(A-)]

Talents

[Weapon mastery] [Mana Control]

At the beginning of the first semester, most of Ellen’s stats were at B-rank, but almost all of them had reached A-rank. She was getting closer and closer to the limits of a human being, so her growth was somewhat slower compared to someone like me.

As we got closer to those limits, our rate of growth was bound to decrease. The Hero’s blood wasn’t an ability that allowed one to simply push past the limits of man.

Although none of our classmates could have been her equal in the first semester as well, it was clear that she had grown stronger.

If she were to use magic body strengthening, her physical abilities would explosively improve.

I wasn’t sure by how much, but I wondered if she would be able to go up to S-rank when using it. If one thought about it that way, she really was a tremendous monster.

All the others were looking at Ellen’s physical stats and were bound to just stare wide-eyed. She had been a monster before, but she was even more of a monster.

Of course, Ellen Artorius wasn’t interested in that. She was just sitting in her seat, staring blankly at the blackboard with her chin resting on one hand.

* * *

Even though we had reached our second semester, the contents of our common classes were pretty much the same. As it was still summer, our P.E. class was still replaced by swimming classes.

At the start of the first semester, I was completely drained by the P.E classes, but after vacations, I was able to handle the curriculum without too much difficulty.

That day, there were some that didn’t return after class and just stayed in the classroom.

-This one, let’s take that class.

-Yeah, yeah. I think that'll be quite fun.

Adelia and Harriet, who wanted to apply for the same lectures, and Ellen and I did that. The three idiot brothers were also talking among each other, probably trying to take the same classes as well, although they were of different majors.

And.,,

Ellen filled in her course registration form at her seat and immediately left the classroom.

No, that was it?

I immediately got up from my seat and called out to Ellen, who was on her way to the teacher’s office.

“H-hey!”

"…What?"

That girl just tilted her head as if there was something wrong with me.

No, seriously.

Wasn't that a bit sad, huh?!

"Hey, shouldn't we also discuss which classes we should take together?"

During those times, we had gotten so much closer that I had completely forgotten how awkward she was. Now that I think about it, even when we got closer during our first semester, we had never even made proper eye contact when we met in the hallways or anything.

"…Why do we have to take the same lectures?"

I felt like she probably didn't understand what being close had to do with attending the same classes.

She was someone who had trouble with the social aspects of life. It had been a while since I felt it. She was rather slow when it came to those things.

Yeah, there wasn't any reason for us to go to the same classes. Strictly speaking, we didn't have to. Erm. Yeah. Obviously.

"If there are any classes that overlap, then we could go to them together!"

She wasn't a supernatural power user, but even if she couldn't go to the supernatural power classes, we could still take swordsmanship classes together!

"…Do you want me to show you?"

Ellen showed me her course registration form as I made a fuss.

She didn't know why I was so angry, but it seemed like she didn't mind if I wanted to go to the same classes as her. It felt kind of strange how she showed me her registration form so casually.

What?

Why did I feel like I was kind of obsessed about that?

No, was that obsession?

S-still… wasn't it good to have someone one was close with in one's course? Wasn't it like that?

Wasn't she acting like someone who didn't really care about me?

Even though I had such thoughts running through my mind, I wrote down the swordsmanship class Ellen had applied for as well as the Demon Ecology class. Her timetable contained various individual professor's lectures on magic enhancement instead of Mana Sensitivity Classes, meaning they were classes that I couldn't take with her.

"By the way…"

"…What?"

Ellen looked at me and asked something as she watched me fill out my registration form in the hallway.

"Do you want to be together with me so badly?"

"…What?"

It felt like she was asking me because she was really curious, not because she wanted to tease me.

"We're always together anyway. We've been training together as well:"

Do you want to be with me so bad that you even want to take the same classes as me, even though we are practically together all the time regardless of our classes? Why?

That was probably what she was thinking.

There were no signs that she was trying to tease me like saying *'Do you like me that much?'*

So my guess was that she was really just curious.

Was she actually a real monster who was unable to understand a human's mind? What was she even saying to me?

Cold sweat was running down my spine because I felt a form of shame that is rather hard to describe.

"Doesn't matter. Get out of here!"

"…?"

I had seen Ellen getting upset from time to time but that was the first time I got upset.

And the fact that I was so upset with a kid made me want to hide myself in a hole.

CHAPTER 182

This was my schedule for the second semester:

Our common classes still took place on Mondays and Thursdays, and the subjects also remained the same.

There wasn't any significant change in the individual professor's classes I chose either.

Tuesday - Swordsmanship Theory II, Swordsmanship Training II, Swordsmanship Application.

Wednesday - Meditation II, Supernatural Power Control, Supernatural Power Application.

Friday - Mana Sensitivity Training II, Comprehensive Martial Arts II, Demon Ecology.

The classes I chose were similar, and most of them were just advanced forms. The only differences from the first semester were Demon Ecology, Supernatural Power Application, and Swordsmanship Application, and there were two other practical classes among them.

The content of those practical classes was to subdue or fight beings summoned through summoning magic or something similar. Swordsmanship Application entailed subduing one's enemy with one's sword, of course, and the supernatural power class was doing so with one's supernatural power.

I both wielded a sword and used my supernatural powers to strengthen my body, so those two classes would end up being the same for me.

Demon Ecology was a lecture that taught its students basic knowledge of Demons, and Supernatural Power Application was to test my supernatural powers in a practical setting.

On Tuesdays, I'd probably spend my whole day with Ellen as I only had swordsmanship lessons on that day.

After classes, in the dormitory.

"It was useful."

I stopped by Class B's dormitory to return the Imperial Crest to Charlotte. She smirked as I handed it over to her.

"So you thought it was very useful? Did you now? To skip the queue to the Warp Gates? As soon as you picked a fight, you pulled it out right away, didn't you?"

How did it feel like being treated like royalty? With that massage, Charlotte gave me a stern look.

"Y-you know all that?"

"If you keep flashing the Imperial coat of arms like that, of course, I would know everything you do with it, don't you think?"

There was no way just anyone could carry around something like that, so it seemed like all reports about what we did at the Warp Gates came back to her. The same went for when I used it in the Darklands.

"Well, didn't you give that thing to me so that I could use it at times like those?"

"That is true."

Charlotte laughed while covering her mouth, saying, "I was just teasing you for a bit." Certainly, the Imperial Crest was one of the most useful items we had taken with us. Not only did it help us to save time, but it also helped us to avoid unnecessary conflicts and situations in which we might have faced murder charges.

With just that little crest, we had managed to end our journey to the Darklands safely, so Charlotte had been a great help.

"I've read all the incident reports. You've worked hard, Reinhardt."

Just like Bertus knew what happened, it was only natural for Charlotte to also know what we went through in the Darklands.

“Shall we take a walk after such a long time?”

There was no reason for me to reject Charlotte’s offer.

* * *

Charlotte and I walked around the park in front of the dormitory. There were hardly any people in the vicinity of the Royal Class’ dormitories, so the chance that we would run into someone was rather low.

By the way, since the vacation was over, I thought she would ask me to deliver more letters to Valier or something. Charlotte wouldn’t be able to send him any letters without me around to deliver them; she couldn’t go to Eleris’s store with her own people.

“It must have been hard. It wasn’t an ordinary incident.”

Charlotte still walked as she let out those words.

“…I can’t even deny that.”

Certainly, both Ellen and I had suffered a lot of trauma ever since that case. I felt like I was finally getting over it.

“Ellen Artorius…”

Charlotte let that name softly roll out of her mouth. The only people who knew Ellen’s real name were Charlotte, Bertus, and I.

Charlotte was speaking slowly as if she was savoring the surname Artorius, as if she was saying Ellen’s name for the first time.

“She’s the sister of a hero. I thought she would be someone outstanding, and she was more outstanding than I thought… Realizing Magic Body Strengthening on her own…”

Charlotte seemed to admire her a lot, speaking as if she never would have thought it

to be possible.

"Ellen Artorius isn't just a hero's younger sister. In the end, Ragan Artorius might end up being remembered as just Ellen Artorius's older brother."

Ellen might become a lot stronger than Ragan Artorius and achieve feats far surpassing her older brother as well as his fame.

It seemed like Charlotte thought things might end up like that.

"It's not easy for someone like you to come back unscathed after going on an adventure with such a great person."

Ellen had great potential. I, however, didn't have any expectations placed on me, but I had still completed that journey with Ellen unharmed, so Charlotte seemed to think that I definitely wasn't some ordinary person either.

"…I'm glad that I didn't get in her way."

Charlotte smiled at my words.

"Still, you two went on a trip together… so, have you ever felt something like palpitations?"

Charlotte's expression changed as she was asking about her friend's love story.

"…What are you talking about?"

"No, but, well, you never know, right?"

What was with her expression? It was so weird.

"What we did over there was far from those kinds of things to begin with. All I could do was try to hold on to my senses, you know?"

Charlotte's expression hardened at my words.

"Ah… That's right. Sorry. I made a mistake."

Charlotte apologized to me, as it was a rather thoughtless question to ask someone

who had just gone through a rather traumatic experience if they had a fling while at it.

"By the way, thanks to what you guys have done, the Imperial Family will soon take action. In the end, everything will be fine."

"Taking action?"

'Why would the Imperial Family take action?' Charlotte tilted her head at my question.

She seemed like she was saying *'Why wouldn't we?'*

"The Adventurers' Guild is an organization supported by the Imperial Family, isn't it? But some adventurers actually dared to steal supplies from the Guild. Isn't that quite shameless?"

They provided support to develop the Darklands, and yet there were people coveting those supplies. It seemed like that greatly besmirched the Imperial Family's goodwill.

"We have to tighten our grip on the Exian Outpost and their adventurer management system. Although we can't prevent such stupid things from happening ever again, we have to make sure that it doesn't happen too often."

The Imperial Family was supporting the Adventurer's Guild, but they had no idea how the Exian Outpost was run. And with news of the resolution of that case reaching the Prince and Princess, the state of the Exian Outpost also reached the ears of the Imperial Family.

Originally, the bandits would have tried to rob some guild supplies and disguise their actions as the doings of Demons.

However, because we managed to intercept their plan, the Imperial Family saw the need to fine-tune the Exian Outpost's management system as well as their Adventurer's Guild.

"There's a huge shortage of manpower, while there are a lot of people around, so it seems like there are a lot of criminal organizations ruling the place from the shadows, so we sent them more manpower. Anyway, thanks to what you guys have

done, Exian will become a little bit safer than it used to be."

What Charlotte seemed to say was that what Ellen and I had done was much greater than we actually thought.

-*Slap!*

"Arg!"

Charlotte suddenly slapped me on my back.

"So, neither you nor Ellen has any reason to be so depressed."

"…Did we look like that?"

Charlotte smiled with her index finger close to her mouth.

"Both of you have been acting as if what you did in the Darklands was a huge sin, saying things like, "nothing happened at all". What do you think it looked like?"

Nothing happened in the Darklands—that was what Ellen and I had told everyone who asked us. Charlotte knew what we had done; that was why she told me about the results of our actions.

Because of what we had done, the crimes committed by adventurers in Exian would be greatly reduced in the future.

"Well then, I shall return… Urgh!"

"…What's wrong?"

Charlotte, who had been talking calmly, suddenly stopped, covering her right eye with her hand.

Charlotte trembled slightly with her back twisted.

"Urg… Ah. It's nothing. I just have to w-wait."

"What's the matter? Do you feel sick?"

“No, just wait… Wait a bit…”

Charlotte took some deep breaths while she covered her eye, then sighed and raised her head after some time. It seemed like she had sweated a little.

“Phew. I’m fine now."

“What happened?”

“Ah… It’s nothing. I’m just like that sometimes.”

Charlotte pretended to be fine and as if nothing happened, but she didn’t look fine at all.

“It’s just something of an aftereffect. It’s been like that ever since I came out of the Demon King’s Castle.”

I guessed that it was something like a panic disorder, but Charlotte told me that it really was nothing, so I shouldn’t worry too much.

Although I didn’t think it was like that, I felt like she would tell me what was really going on. Charlotte said that she needed some rest and that she would return to the dormitory, so we walked back together.

Charlotte took out a letter while we were on our way.

“…I’m sorry to ask this of you every time.”

“Don’t be. It’s fine.”

However, different from before, the expression on Charlotte’s face as she gave me the letter was a little sad.

* * *

The content of the letter wasn’t much different from before. She wrote about what she did during the vacation and what happened; she also asked me how I was doing.

I was getting used to writing her replies filled with nonsensical lies. The more I grew accustomed to what I shouldn’t, the more guilty I felt towards Charlotte.

After writing my reply in Eleris's store, I went to its first floor.

Eleris had a large bag on the table.

The proceeds from selling the precious metals from the Darklands we sold through the Thieves' Guild had come in.

It was a total of 3500 gold coins. That was a huge amount of money, equivalent to about 3.5 billion won. It was said that the amount they obtained from the grave was enough to satisfy a whole expedition team consisting of 20 adventurers, after all. It was only natural that we would get that much, as we took everything for ourselves.

Since we would divide all of that into three equal parts, it would be more than 1 billion won for each of us.

"Leave my cut to the Rotary Gang, I'll take Ellen's money to her."

"Yes, Your Highness."

"Look for a house or a room with that money. Don't just invest everything into the Rotary Gang, you hear?"

"Is that… Is that really okay…?"

Eleris seemed to be at a loss for words as to whether she could really spend that huge amount of money just for herself. Although I had told her to do that from the start, it seemed like she felt dizzy with that much money in front of her.

If I were to spend that money, it would just be related to the Rotary Gang, so I didn't need that money right away. I was thinking of saving it as capital for a new business venture or something.

So the only thing I was going to take with me was the money I had agreed to give to Ellen.

"But it's way too heavy."

-Clang

Money is good and all, but it was heavy as hell!

“I… I should have exchanged them for platinum coins, but… if I had gone to a financial institution… It might be rather uncomfortable if they… started asking about how I obtained this money. So, I just brought it here first…”

“That’s enough. I’ll just treat it as a work-out.”

It wasn’t too heavy to carry yet.

* * *

A school day.

I only had classes related to swordsmanship all day.

In the end, even though I was a bit upset with Ellen, I still applied for the same classes as her.

I turned into some character that got upset at the simplest thing but still clung on like some obsessive man. Just who the hell did I turn into? If a side character, who definitely wasn’t the protagonist, acted like that, readers would comment something like *‘I fucking hate him. When are you going to kill him off?’*

Swordsmanship Theory, Swordsmanship Training, and Swordsmanship Application.

All of those subjects were one bundle. After the application training, I would be given an extra lunch break.

The classes were taught by a different teacher than the one we had in our first semester, so there was quite a difference. In the first semester, the only student of the Royal Class who took the swordsmanship classes was Ellen.

About fifty people attended the classes in the second semester.

Among them were four Royal Class students, including me.

Ellen, me, B-2 Scarlett, and B-11 Ludwig.

Somehow, I ended up taking the same classes as the main character.

“Reinhardt! Did you apply for the same class as me?”

“Yeah.”

“Ellen is also with you. Hey!”

-Nod

Our lively, allrounder protagonist, who was always energetic, was still more than energetic. Ellen just nodded at Ludwig’s words, who looked rather tense.

Ludwig naturally sat next to me.

So there was Ellen on my right and Ludwig on my left.

Did Ellen take the same classes as Ludwig in the second semester of their first year in the original? I didn’t think so.

I felt like the development had changed a little. Maybe it was just Scarlett who initially took the class.

Ellen wouldn’t act like her character in the original novel because too many things had changed around her because of me.

“Scarlett! Scarlett, come here as well. Let’s sit together.”

“Ah… Yes."

Scarlett, who was sitting far away from us, sat next to Ludwig when he called out to her. However, I could clearly see how awkward she felt. Scarlett nodded slightly when she made eye contact with me. That was all she did.

Just what was different from the original?

She should have become close friends with Ludwig after she saved her from her bullies during the first semester.

However, it was Charlotte who settled Scarlett’s situation.

So it seemed like Ludwig wanted to get closer to Scarlett, but she seemed to have a hard time dealing with him.

Proof of that would be that she still spoke rather formally with him.

That situation came to be because one of the major incidents involving a main heroine had completely disappeared. Of course, Scarlett didn't seem to hate Ludwig, she just seemed to feel uncomfortable around him.

So now Ludwig was nothing more than maybe air to her.

Actually…

What did I care?

That wasn't enough to worry me. Who cared about the main character, anyway?!

Just like the Gates would always appear no matter what I did, they would also always appear no matter what Ludwig did or didn't do!

Anyway…

Our situation could still exist in the confines of the main story.

-There are… Four Royal Class students in this course.

-There are also two Orbis Class students.

-The standard of this class is just too high…

Ludwig would meet some of the Oribis Class students right when the second semester started.

After following Ellen there, I suddenly became acutely aware of that situation.

* * *

Temple had hundreds of uniforms with different designs. Of course, I didn't what

school they were part of, even if I looked at them. All I recognized was the Royal Class uniform that I wore.

However, there were two that were the most famous. To those who wore them they, served as both a business card and an identification card.

The Royal Class, and the Orbis Class.

The Orbis and Royal Classes were small groups of elites with, at most, 20 students in each year. There were six such students in that course, so it was only natural that the other participants were rather noisy. Some of them seemed to have high expectations, others seemed to lament the fact that their grades had basically been fixed.

Anyway, that was the first time I saw Orbis Class' uniform. 'So that was how it looked like.'

Royal Class' uniform seemed prettier.

The theory class teacher entered the classroom and took attendance, each student raising their hand one after the other.

"Royal Class A-2, Ellen."

"Yes."

"Royal Class A-11, Reinhardt."

"Yes."

"Royal Class B-3, Scarlett."

"Yes."

"Royal Class B-11, Ludwig."

"Yees!"

.

.

.

After calling out each name one after the other…

“Orbis Class A-8, Adler Belkin.”

“Yeah.”

“Orbis Class B-3, Nilssonia.”

“Yes.”

Like Royal Class, Orbis Class was also divided into Class A and B. Even within our special class, they deemed one class superior to the other. I believed that the Orbis Class was no different.

Of the fifty students present, four were from the Royal Class and two from the Orbis Class.

As Harriet had said the other day, the students of Royal Class didn’t care about the Orbis Class.

However, the Orbis Class continued to train intensely with the aim of never losing against the Royal Class.

As they obtained their position through effort, going through grueling training was just a daily routine for them.

They were a class that hated talent.

Therefore, it was only natural that the looks in the eyes of the two Orbis Class students, who stared at us, sitting in the order of Scarlett, Ludwig, me, and Ellen, weren’t pretty.

According to the original, Scarlett and Ludwig were the only ones who were supposed to take that class.

Ellen and I were never supposed to be there.

So I had no idea if the development would change or not.

The lesson after the theory class was swordsmanship training.

Originally, during that class, Ludwig would have suffered a crushing defeat in a practice match against one of the Orbis Class students.

It was a scene to give impact to the first appearance of the Orbis Class students, showcasing how different they were from the sloppy Royal Class students, who only believed in their talents and didn't put any effort into them.

—That Orbis Class couldn't be compared to guys like Erich and Cayer, and that they were blinded by jealousy and hatred towards the Royal Class.

That was the first appearance of the second semester's antagonists.

However, since two additional characters had been added to the class, there was a possibility that Ellen or I might have to have a practice match against them.

I wasn't so sure about myself, but if Ellen ended up having that practice match, she'd blow them away for sure.

Would that be okay?

CHAPTER 183

The practical class after the theoretical one.

My worries were useless.

As soon as the practical lesson began, the teacher in charge gathered us all up in the huge practice room and spoke as if they had something interesting planned.

“We have six students from special Classes here. Do the Orbis and Royal Classwa want to have a practice match against each other? Is there anyone among you who wants to try?”

“I’ll do it!”

The first one to jump up after they asked for volunteers was Ludwig, who was more than motivated.

…That was the kind of guy he was, after all.

Everyone’s eyes twinkled hearing that there would be a practice match between the Orbis Class and the Royal Class. Ellen was spacing out as if she didn’t care, and Scarlett seemed slightly nervous, being addressed like that.

“Then, someone from the Orbis Class’s side.”

“I’ll do it.”

A determined-looking girl walked out from the Orbis Class’s side.

Number B-3, the one who was introduced as Nilssonia. Adler Belking of Class A just watched with his arms crossed.

Nilssonia, she had horribly beaten Ludwig in the original, and from that, Ludwig learned that the Orbis Class guys were extraordinarily strong.

“Take care not to get too violent.”

It was clear that the teacher in charge pitted the two special classes, the Orbis Class and Royal Class, against each other on purpose, even though they knew that they were rivals.

Ludwig and Nilssonia faced each other holding their training swords.

“You said your name was Nilssonia, right? I’ll be in your care.”

“…”

That girl named Nilssonia didn’t react at all to Ludwig’s greeting. Her expression seemed as if she viewed it as a real match.

The atmosphere around her was kind of scary.

“Start.”

“Hap!”

Nilssonia wildly rushed towards Ludwig as if she didn't care for anything else. I couldn’t properly remember how their duel was supposed to go.

He probably lost because of the overwhelming difference in technique or something like that. That was the reason why Ludwig got motivated to train even more… Something like that.

-Kaang!

As soon as the training swords hit each other, Nilssonia let her sword slide across the other sword in an attempt to brush off Ludwig’s sword.

At the moment when she was about to push his sword away, the look in Ludwig’s eyes changed. Up until then, he had worn a rather silly expression.

-Kang!

In spite of her attempt to deflect his sword, Ludwig applied more strength to his sword.

“Urg!”

-Kadang!

And, Nilssonia, who had been pushed down by that light push, fell down on the floor.

The match was decided in a flash.

"Ah, I-I’m sorry! Are you okay?”

‘What was that?’

‘Why did he win?’

Although it was Nilssonia who lost, it was my brain that was on the verge of freezing.

* * *

There was only one reason for Ludwig’s victory:

An overwhelming difference in strength.

Ludwig’s physical strength was simply so great that it was pretty much impossible to do anything against it using technique. He had just hit his sword against hers and pushed her away before she could do anything.

Even in the original, Ludwig didn’t lose due to strength, but due to his lack of technique, so he would lose all five of the practice matches…

However, the results were different.

-Bang!

“Urg!”

.

.

-Kadang!

“Uhuurk!”

.

.

-Pak!

“Urg!”

“A-are you okay? I’m, I’m sorry.”

In the next three practice matches, Nilssonia was nothing but pushed around by that guy’s overwhelming strength.

In the end, Ludwig hit her hard enough to see the difference between them.

Nilssonia threw herself on the floor without hesitation, her mouth gaping open.

It was as if she never imagined that she would get so horribly beaten.

Even Ludwig was nervous and worried about her, which seemed to make Nilssonia feel even more miserable.

He sure had a knack for making people feel bad with his stupidly good nature.

“Stop, stop. I think the strength difference is just too great. Stop.”

In the end, even the teacher declared that the results would be more than obvious even if they didn’t finish the practice matches, which were scheduled to be five rounds. Nilssonia limped back to her seat and sat down with a wretched expression, hiding her own shame, on her face.

The face of the Orbis Class Class A guy was also seriously stiff.

Ludwig came back to our side and sat down with his head down. It seemed like he also didn’t expect that things would turn out like that.

The one that was supposed to be defeated ended up winning.

—And by a landslide.

Just what was different?

“Teacher.”

Then, the grimacing Orbis Class Class A guy, who had been watching, raised his hand.

“Ah, do you want to try?”

“Yes.”

The situation couldn’t be ended by Orbis Class’ defeat. How could the Orbis Class lose so badly against the Royal Class?

That class was almost like the army, so if it got out, they might get gathered up and beaten by their seniors.

First, that guy’s face showed anger at their loss, but he also seemed contemplative. He seemed afraid of what would happen if it became known.

“Who’ll be your opponent? Ludwig again?”

The teacher looked towards Ludwig. The guy just grinned stupidly, scratching the back of his neck.

“Ah, i-if it’s someone from Class A… I, as the last place in Royal Class, wouldn’t be a match for him…”

“!”

Last place.

When they heard those two words, I could see the two Orbis Class students, as well as the regular course students who were also attending the class, flinch.

Although he had fought someone from Orbis Class’ Class B, it was still like saying that the No. 3 lost against Royal Class’ last place.

‘Wow.’

‘This bastard.’

Did that guy finally learn how to piss people off? Was he some kind of master?

Of course, if we were to go by his actual skills, things would obviously be different, but it was true that Ludwig was ranked last in the Royal Class.

But if he said it like that, didn’t that make him seem totally arrogant? Wasn’t he totally scolding the Orbis Class in front of everyone?

Even the last place of the Royal Class is much stronger than you.

That was what it sounded like, you punk!

“Hmm yes. Class B should match up with Class B, so let’s have someone from Class A fight someone else from Class A, how about that? Okay. That’s plausible. Then, we need one person from Royal Class’ Class A.”

The teacher completely fell for Ludwig’s weakling act. That guy, Adler or something, was looking at us as if he preferred someone from Class A.

“Hey.”

-Tug

“…?”

I poked Ellen, who just looked at me and tilted her head.

“Go up there. What are you doing?”

‘Go and beat him up!’ I didn’t want to deal with that guy who looked like a pain in the ass! Ellen just looked at me with a sullen look and shook her head.

“Don’t wanna.”

“…What?”

“Go.”

Ellen murmured quietly.

"Go beat him up."

I suddenly remembered that time when we were drinking in the mansion on the Edina Islands. She had told me to participate in the tournament and go up to the quarter-finals.

It seemed like Ellen wanted to see how I'd do against someone of the Orbis Class.

I could see Adler's face crumple up at the words *'Go beat him up'.* Did he hear something like *'He's not even worthy for me to deal with him'?*

"If you lose, I'll hit you."

Of course, Ellen wasn't even looking at me.

Was I her Pokemon or something? Did I have to go and fight if she said "Go, Reinhardt!"

"Fucking hell, If I win, I'll hit you then."

I felt like I was being treated like a Pokemon, but I went out anyway.

* * *

My opponent was Adler Belkin, A-8 of the Orbis Class. Nilssonia was a woman, whereas he was a man. He gave off a cold impression, but I could see in his eyes that he felt really tense.

The Royal Class didn't change their numbering, as they arranged it in order of talent, but the Orbis Class was different in that regard.

Classes and numbers changed continuously based on competitions held every semester. Since it was a Class that valued effort, the rankings would get changed according to one's effort and performance.

Since we were in our second semester, there would soon be a change in their rankings, unlike in the first semester.

In the Royal Class, those numbers weren't exactly rankings.

However, in the Orbis Class, those numbers were most definitely the most important.

So, that Nilssonia, who Ludwig had just faced, was probably ranked 13th in the Orbis Class.

Of course, there were also magic and academic major students among them, so that ranking didn't necessarily reflect their physical strength.

Anyway.

Orbis Class A-8 would mean that he was the 8th strongest in Orbis Class' first year.

To put these things in a slightly wider perspective…

Temple had more than 100,000 students.

If we only look at the first years in the High School section, it would be around 10,000.

Royal Class students were selected by talent, but Orbis Class students were selected by skill.

To put it bluntly, that guy in front of me should be the eighth-best person in terms of skill among all combat majors, including the general students, except for his talent. That was why he was chosen for the Orbis Class.

If one put it like that, he sure seemed amazing.

And that guy was staring at me as if he was about to grab and kill me.

"Now, this will be the first of five matches. Don't get too riled up."

'Teacher? Isn't my opponent already more than riled up? Why are you pretending to not see that?'

They announced the start of the practice match, and I was waiting to receive his blow.

However, he didn't come closer to me and just kept his distance, looking at me before opening his mouth.

"You said you were Class A Number 11."

"Yeah, that's right."

"So you're the last place of Royal Class' Class A?"

"Hmm…"

If I wanted to make him feel even worse, I had to answer yes to that question.

But did I really need to?

"Well? The Royal Class doesn't go by the same system as you. These numbers aren't really rankings and don't reflect our skills, after all, right?"

I shrugged as I said so.

"You must have gone crazy now."

I pointed to my classmates in the Royal Class who were watching me with a slight smile on my lips.

"Although I'm in Class A, I'm actually the weakest in the Royal Class."

"…What?"

Did I really have to make him feel bad?

Of course I did!

People make mistakes when they start seeing red, after all!

"So, if you lose to me…"

Ellen had said "Go, Reinhardt!" so I was giving it my all.

"You're really nothing more than dogshit."

Reinhardt used Taunt!

“…Get ready to lose.”

It was very effective!

* * *

That bastard definitely hit pretty hard.

-Kang! Kaaang!

His physical strength, his agility, and his sword skills were certainly considerable, so I continued to fight him while taking steps back to prevent that guy from getting a chance to slash his sword at me.

No matter how much I had learned my swordsmanship from Ellen, it had been just half a year at most. I also had practical experience, but I never had to deal with a guy like that before.

It was Temple, a place filled with guys professionally trained to wield weapons.

And that guy had entered Orbis Class on his skills alone.

He wasn’t someone who just kind of learned how to swing a sword like the guys I encountered in the Darklands. He was someone who had been sharpening his sword skills for much longer than I had and had put a lot more effort into it than I.

-Kang, kaang! Kang!

"Do you only know how to run away? Is it because you’re the weakest?”

When I kept backing up and didn’t try to get closer or slash at him at all, he sarcastically tried to poke at me.

He was superior to me in strength.

…And it was also more than certain that he had the upper hand in terms of technique.

However, because he was so riled up, his sword strikes were rather rough. I could almost feel how anxious he was to finally get a hit in.

Unlike when Ludwig was fighting Nilssonia, our confrontation was prolonged, as I kept on calmly stepping back and gave him no chance to slash at me or stab me.

I couldn't keep backing away, so I tried to grab his sword, which he thrust towards my chest using half-swording.

A quick counter-attack after pretending to be pushed back again.

"Hap!"

However, as if he had predicted what I was planning on doing, he stopped the sword that was thrusting at me and spun around.

What I did felt like a desperate attempt to turn the scales while being thoroughly beaten.

"Don't mess with me."

He pointed his sword at my neck. His expression showed utter contempt as if he was looking at a bug.

It was my defeat.

"The first match is Orbis Class' victory. Get back in position."

It was a match consisting of five battles. Ludwig and Scarlett seemed quite surprised that I had lost. Ellen was looking at me with a sullen expression on her face.

She looked dissatisfied.

That guy was definitely quite hard-hitting, and in our first match, he won against me, who was supposed to be the weakest, though not easily.

"I heard that the Royal Class was full of people who only believed in their talent. I guess you're just one of those people as well."

Adler beat me once and was already openly looking down on me. It looked like he

already made an estimate of my strength. I had kept backing up and had even failed my clumsy attempt at a counterattack.

"I don't think I need to fight you anymore. How about the stronger one steps up now?"

It seemed like he thought he could pass on to the next person now that he already had an estimate of me.

"Hey, while we're at it, let me tell you something."

"…What?"

"You've been going on about my talent."

I grinned at him.

"Actually, my talent is a supernatural ability."

I pointed my training sword at him.

"I didn't use it, though. I thought you'd find it unfair otherwise."

I was treated like someone who blindly believed in his talent and someone who never put any effort into anything. However, I just said that I didn't even use my talent.

"Am I allowed to use my supernatural power from now on?"

I had simply fought with him without using my supernatural power at all.

That was the reason why Ellen looked a bit angry—I didn't use my supernatural power. It seemed like I was just playing around with that guy, completely giving up on the fight.

"Should I go and really trust in my talent starting now?"

What are you gonna do?

His eyes turned completely cold at my second taunt. That guy bore complete hatred

for talent inside of him. He thought I was someone who would blindly believe in his talent, never even thinking to put in any effort, and yet I had faced him with the skill I had acquired purely through my effort.

If that guy wanted to surpass the Royal Class, then he had to overpower me while I was using my supernatural powers.

“Do it. Whatever.”

Those words were enough to provoke Adler.

“Then shall we start?”

“…”

Type A.

I could have used the melee sword fighting preset, but I decided to do it a little differently.

—Strengthening my physical power.

I only strengthened the power of my muscles to the max.

That guy approached me and stabbed his sword towards my body. It was a sword strike aiming to clash against the opponent's weapon and continue from there.

Before, I would have blocked that strike and backed away, but I wouldn’t do that after activating my ability.

“Hap!”

I simply hit the incoming sword with my own.

-Kaang!

“!”

Fragments of the training sword, which had been smashed to pieces by my single swing, were scattered on the floor of the training room.

That guy was just staring blankly at me and his broken training sword with a puzzled expression on his face—the training sword broke in just one attack.

If the sword hadn’t been broken, he would have been sent flying along with it or lost his grip on it.

Silence fell upon the training room.

“I don’t think I need to fight you anymore, ain’t that right?”

The moment our swords clashed, his training sword would shatter, or if it didn't, he’d lose his grip on it as soon as I hit it.

So the more we fought, the more obvious the results would become.

Like that, I simply returned the words Adler Belkin had said to me just a few moments before.

CHAPTER 184

Before using my supernatural powers, I had been losing through a long, drawn-out battle.

After I started using my supernatural powers, I was able to decide the match in a single strike.

Adler seemed unwilling to step down, though.

After that, we had three more practice matches, and I used my supernatural powers to their full extent in all of them.

However, as long as I strengthened my body with my power, my abilities would be overwhelmingly superior to Adler Belkin's. I only broke his training sword once, though.

I was stronger, faster, and more accurate than him, and I was also superior to him in technique due to the aid of my supernatural ability.

My supernatural power, which got increasingly stronger, didn't just strengthen my physical power anymore—it even helped me improve my level of swordsmanship.

Eventually, Orbis Class' A-8 Adler Belkin returned to his seat, a look of defeat etched onto his face.

Class B's Nilssonia lost to Ludwig…

And Class A's Adler Belkin lost to me, the self-proclaimed weakest.

The practice match between the Royal Class and the Orbis Class ended in the devastating defeat of the Orbis Class.

"Are you ready?"

-Tak!

"…Why did you flick me?"

When I went back to my seat, I flicked a finger against Ellen's forehead. She then covered it with her palm and stared at me.

"If I lose, I'll get hit. If I win, you'll get hit, right?"

"…I never agreed to that."

"I never agreed to getting hit either."

"…"

Ellen was speechless as if she couldn't find any words to throw back at me.

She sulked like that sometimes.

It was insanely cute.

It was equal to if not better to Harriet's sulking.

However, unlike Harriet, she was a little trickier to deal with, so that was a problem.

…But why was I even thinking so hard about that?

"Reinhardt, how are you so good? You really improved your skills a lot."

"Is that so?"

Ludwig was muttering beside me, thinking that I was able to overpower that guy with my supernatural ability.

My fight was what it was, but I was wondering just how the hell he became so much stronger. Just what had changed?

Scarlett didn't really talk to me, but her expression was slightly flushed from excitement.

She must have been really impressed.

“By the way, what did you mean with you’re the weakest? I’m not sure I could ever beat you, you know?”

Ludwig didn’t seem to believe that I was the weakest among the four of us.

“That statement was based on the premise that I didn’t use my supernatural ability.”

“Ah… But I still think that I’m still far behind you.”

‘Don’t speak fucking bullshit, Mr. Main Character.’ I wasn’t sure about the outcome if I used my supernatural powers, but if I fought that guy without them, I would, without a doubt, lose. He only had one talent, Stamina, but he was the ‘main character’, after all.

I bet he had some sort of trait—a setting I had never created.

Just like Ellen had the trait Hero’s Blood, there have should be other traits I wasn’t aware of.

Ludwig should have a lot of such corrective traits. Why? Because he was the main character.

Maybe he also had Hero’s Blood? He would eventually become just as strong as Ellen, after all.

And to begin with, even if I used my supernatural ability, I could never defeat Ellen, even if she didn’t use magic body strengthening, and it wouldn’t work against Scarlett either. Scarlett’s skills were enough to compete with even Cliffman, who had a combat-focused talent.

Still, thanks to my self-suggestion getting stronger from all those experiences, I felt like my physical abilities had explosively improved.

Now, if I could just enhance my magical power, I wouldn’t want for anything more.

Improving my physical abilities with magic body strengthening and then buffing them again through my self-suggestion…

I’d be able to beat up anyone coming at me with that double buff cast on me.

But could I even do that?

I thought it really was about time for me to get my third talent. I had been really patient for such a long time, after all.

Anyway, the class commenced without the Orbis Class trying to take unprovoked revenge on the Royal Class.

* * *

After the class ended, I looked up Ludwig's physical data and found out why he ended up becoming so strong.

B-11 Ludwig

[Strength 14.2(B-)]

[Agility 10.4(C)]

[Dexterity 9.7(C-)]

[Magical Power 9.2(C)]

[Stamina 32.2(S)]

Talents

[Stamina]

Ludwig's physical abilities were improving so rapidly that they couldn't even be compared to his stats in the original novel anymore. His stamina had already surpassed human limits and reached the S Rank. Not even Ellen had reached S Rank in any of her stats.

There was only one reason:

Because of my involvement, Ludwig had not gotten involved in any incidents or problems within his class.

He didn't have to pay attention to anything else and had just focused on his own training that—was why his physical ability had risen so much more than in the novel.

As all his burdens had disappeared, the main character was able to become stronger than usual since there was nothing to distract him.

Even if I used my supernatural ability, I might not be able to beat him.

What was with that?

* * *

To summarize, there were no more fights with the Orbis Class, and we just trained as we took the classes together. I felt like the losing side's mood had been put down by a lot, but anyway, the class ended without any incidents. There were no quarrels with them after that either.

However, when I returned to the dormitory, the atmosphere turned a little strange.

-Just tell the teacher.

-No. It's too embarrassing.

The three idiot brothers were sitting in the lobby seriously talking about something amongst themselves. What was the matter? What did they not want to tell the teacher?

It looked like Erich was the main topic of their talk. When I looked closely, I could see that the boy's face was slightly swollen.

"What? How'd you become like that?"

"!"

"R-Reinhardt…"

Cayer, Kono Lint, and Erich were all stunned when I suddenly approached them.

Looking at Erich de Lafaeri's face, it was more than obvious that he had been beaten up. Erich, who seemed to have worked out a little during the vacation, at first had wanted to try me again, but when he found out that I did something very unusual in the Darklands, he gave up all thought of that.

All three of them seemed surprised because they didn't expect me to show any interest in them.

"What? I'm asking you something, you punk."

Why were those bastards so slow to answer my question?

Did they want to get hit more?

* * *

Sitting diagonally across from Erich on the armrest of the chair Kono Lint was sitting on, I listened to what happened to him.

"…Did you get into a fight with the Orbis Class?"

"…Uh."

It seemed like Erich had gotten involved in a similar incident to us that day. That guy took a different swordsmanship class, and it seemed like there was an Orbis Class student among its participants.

So I was pretty sure that I had hit the nail on the head.

"You fucking bastard. Did you or did you not get into a fight with them? Talk already."

"Yes! I-I was about to tell you!"

-Flinch!

Erich's whole body strongly flinched when I raised my hand. 'Do I just have to raise my hand without even hitting them now to make them tremble?'

It sure was interesting how they immediately rebounded after just having lost their fear of me.

"Ya think it's a good thing that you got pissed off after they defeated you during practice and then got beat up by them after class? And you, Cayer…"

"Ah… Huh?"

"What are you so proud of that you wanna go and tell the teachers all about it?"

"B-but he got beaten up and…"

"Huuh?"

Cayer shut his mouth when he saw me frowning.

What happened to him was similar to what went down in my case, but the results were the direct opposite of each other.

While attending the swordsmanship class, Erich had a practice match with the Orbis Class like myself, and after being miserably beaten, it seemed like his pride had gotten severely hurt.

"If you tell people who are very sensitive to the word "talent" that you'll be able to step on them next year because they don't even have a talent, you'd be very lucky if they didn't send you flying. You met someone with one hell of a good personality—he just beat you up a little and then let you go."

After losing to the Orbis Class kid, he had told him, "You don't even have a talent, so I'll be able to step all over you next year, anyway. Enjoy it while it lasts, okay~?"

He looked like a complete piece of shit.

That punk should be glad that he didn't get stabbed. Anyway, it seemed like he struck one of the opponent's nerves, so he had got beaten quite viciously before crawling back. Erich got squashed without even being able to refute.

However, Erich was slightly different from how he was in the original.

He was someone who didn't know how to put effort into anything, although he did end up making an effort later on, it was at a much later time.

However, looking at his physical stats, that guy seemed to have worked out a little during the vacation. Of course, it was just weight training, I believe.

Seeing that he was acting really strangely towards me as soon as school started again, I could guess why he did that.

"I think you did a bit of training during the vacation to stick it to me to begin with, am I right?"

"!!"

"Seems like I am."

I could see Erich's complexion grow pale, perhaps because my guess was correct.

It seemed like that bastard decided to train during the vacation because he felt pressured by me, and it looked like he had planned to deal with me during the new semester.

It was more than clear that the three idiot brothers were looking down on me, and there was also a time in the past where I had beat up Erich like Cayer.

However, it was clear that he gave up on those plans pretty early on. He probably had a strong hunch that he wasn't the only one who had gotten stronger.

Still, he had gained more confidence in himself, so he had to play big before someone, but it seemed that the other party was someone of the Orbis Class. Erich and the other two, whose thoughts had been laid bare, seemed like they were slowly dying in real-time.

"Shameful little bastards. If you can't beat me, don't try to mess with me. Same goes for the guy you got fucked up by today."

He was so overconfident that it hurt. Why was he so rude when he knew he couldn't beat that guy? Erich couldn't even raise his face as I was insulting him.

“Beating up the other kids again… Are you some thug?”

“…?”

I turned around at the sudden voice coming from behind me and saw Harriet looking at me with her arms crossed, sighing.

“…Beat up who?”

“Otherwise, why does his face look like that?”

Looking at Erich’s beaten-up face, it was only natural that she thought that it was me who had hit him.

“No, it wasn’t me, right? Hey. Did I hit you?”

“Huh? Ah… N-no. He didn’t do… it.”

When I glared at him with a grim look in my eyes, Erich immediately answered.

What the hell? Now it looked like I was threatening him to pretend like I didn’t hit him after I did just that.

No, I really didn’t do it!

Harriet was looking at me as if I was crazy.

“…Wow, you look like a real thug… Now you’re even threatening him…”

That brat.

She looked like she was actually a bit disappointed in me, didn’t she?

No! I really didn’t hit him!

I felt like crying.

I felt like the boy who cried wolf.

Harriet let out a sigh, and—looking at Erich, who had crumpled up—shouted at him

with a shrill voice.

“You too! Don’t you feel ashamed always getting beat up by that guy? If you don’t like it, just tell the teacher or something so that he can’t do these things anymore.”

“H-he really didn’t hit…”

“What happened to your face then? If he hit you, you should just say that he hit you!”

“That, that… That… That’s…”

‘Wow.’

‘He might get PTSD from this school year.’

Hearing those things from a third party hurt a lot more than getting hit.

Harriet didn’t seem to realize that she was slowly shattering Erich’s dignity.

‘What is this?’

I was just trying to talk some smack to them because I saw them grumbling behind my back and they had seemed like they wanted to jump me.

Then Harriet had suddenly intervened and went even beyond the level of true education. I didn’t want to smack them down that hard, you know?

I didn’t actually beat him, either!

“He’s actually nothing. He just has a dirty temper, so if you really stick it to him and are bold, he can’t do anything against you.”

“Ah. That… That’s…”

Harriet kept on beating Erich up with her words without a single break. He didn’t even know what she was talking about.

"Harriet? What’s going on?”

And when Harriet was muttering some words that felt like a good old sermon, she

attracted some attention.

That time, Liana de Grantz seemed to have gotten curious and approached us. Harriet sighed as she pointed at me.

“That bastard just can’t let go of his habits and is bullying the others again.”

No.

‘I was just asking him what happened! I didn’t actually hit him. I was a bit rough with my words, but I really didn’t hit them!’

‘And now you’re just picking on me!’ She didn’t even realize that I actually felt like I was being bullied.

Looking at Erich’s face…

Because Liana had also come over, he seemed like he wanted to actually die. The other two didn’t look much different.

“…It’s just been two days of school.”

Liana looked at me as if I was a dog who couldn’t hold his poop in. She couldn’t help but look at me as if I was pathetic. Then she looked down at Erich, smirked, and said:

“Why are you even getting hit?”

After Liana gave him the final blow, she simply slipped away.

CHAPTER 185

Erich was turned into a living corpse. He was beaten up by the Orbis Class and whined to the others, but he only got his mentality completely shattered by the guys from the Royal Class.

Thinking of it, Erich was already made into a permanent sandbag, as he had been the main instigator of Scarlett's bullying.

That wasn't what I wanted to talk about, though.

"Why are you suddenly acting like you're worried about them? And I really didn't hit them."

"Sure."

"Seriously! I really didn't hit them!"

No matter what I said, she wouldn't believe me.

Anyway, I didn't expect Harriet would intervene after seeing me like that, so I was strangely bewildered.

The three brothers had snuck out of the room, so after looking around, there was only Harriet and me left in the lobby.

"And why would I care about them? I'm just saying that you shouldn't do these things. I hate seeing you like that."

Her focus wasn't on the kids getting bullied but on the fact that I bullied people. That was kind of sad as well.

Harriet's character had changed so much that it couldn't even be compared to the one she had in the original. Where the hell did the Harriet go who treated kids from lowly backgrounds with utter contempt?

It seemed that such contempt for commoners forcibly disappeared the more

involved she got with me.

“What was it this time?”

“What?”

“What did they do this time to piss you off?”

“Ah.”

Harriet seemed to be curious as to why I did what I did, believing that it wasn’t for no reason.

"Nothing really, I was just asking that guy where he got the bruises from and what he did to get them.”

“…You didn’t beat him up?”

"No! I didn’t beat him up, okay?”

You really didn’t? I could clearly see what she was thinking by the look in her eyes.

She was just that convinced that I did that. Weak, it couldn’t be helped that things were like that. I was the boy who cried wolf in that situation, after all. No one would believe me, no matter how I tried to explain myself.

"Looks like he got beaten up after getting in a fight with the Orbis Class, so that was why I just said a few words that they should stop picking fights and stuff…”

“…The Orbis Class?”

“Yeah. Seems like he got beat up after picking a fight with them after class because he lost in their practice match.”

Harriet seemed to have fallen in a slight daze when she heard that things were a lot different from what she thought.

“Just what is wrong with him?”

“If you ask a leaky bucket why it's leaking, would you get any other answer but

because ‘it's leaking because it’s leaky’?”

“…What are you talking about?”

“That’s just how that guy is.”

When Harriet heard that idiot got so mad after he lost in the match and got beaten up for it, she felt that Erich seemed even more pathetic.

He was just someone who was bound to get beaten up wherever he went.

Harriet’s evaluation of Erich seemed to have fallen even lower. She was staring at me with her arms folded.

“…Come to think of it, aren’t you like that as well?”

“…What?”

“If you go around and piss people off and create grudges, you’re bound to get beaten up.”

“…What are you on about?”

“Or you’ll fight with them over nothing as soon as you bump into students of the Orbis Class.”

No matter whether Erich got beaten up or not, taking my personality into consideration, it seemed like she was convinced that either of those two situations would occur.

“…Something similar happened to me already, though?”

“…What? You fought?”

“It wasn't a fight! Hey! Do I look like some crazy bastard that punches everyone he sees?… I know what you think! We just had a practice match this time!”

When I explained to her what happened, me having already fought against students

of the Orbis Class and completely defeating them, Harriet looked a bit tired.

“…Yes, you didn’t just brawl.”

“I’m also someone who greatly cares about manners and dignity, you know? It might be hard to believe, though.”

“…Hah, you deliberately lost without using your supernatural powers, then overwhelmingly won when you used them and were intentionally rude to him. I know everything, you know?”

“…No, that’s not it.”

Why did she know me so well? Did she know exactly when and how I lost my temper?

Harriet and I chatted about various things in the lobby until I heard someone calling me from behind.

“Reinhardt.”

“Ah, yeah.”

It was Ellen, who had changed from her school uniform into training clothes.

She pointed her chin towards the training room. It looked like I was going to have some training with her.

"It’s fine to win using your supernatural powers, but you do know that you would have been completely defeated if you didn’t have them, right?”

"I know, okay? I’m not proud of that either, you know?”

“You seemed very proud, believing in your supernatural power.”

‘Damnit.’

Anyway, it was time for training.

“I’m leaving, okay?”

“Huh? Ah… Yes ”

Harriet nodded with a slightly blank expression pasted on her face.

* * *

That day’s training session wasn’t all that long because I had to hand over something I couldn’t the previous day.

“…Are all of these gold coins?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Ellen looked surprised when she saw that huge bag filled with gold coins that I carried into her room.

“Exactly 180. If you want to count, go ahead.”

“Annoying.”

It would certainly be quite difficult to count them. Ellen seemed surprised at the amount of gold she received, but she didn’t seem to be that thrilled over it. One could buy a lot of things, like food and clothes, with that money

The real reward we took with us from the Darklands wasn’t the earrings I gave to Harriet or the cursed sword, but the money.

It was a huge amount of money worth billions of won.

However, since we were in Temple, a place in which we were 100% guaranteed to receive food, clothing, and shelter, Ellen and I weren’t that impressed by it. As Ellen simply lifted and let go of the pouch filled with gold coins with a clunk, she leaned over and looked at me.

“It’s burdensome.”

Ellen didn’t seem to feel anything much about that enormous amount of money.

“Then give it to me.”

“Don’t want to.”

She shook her head and refused my attempt at getting more than a 1,000 gold coins like that. Tch, I thought I would get even more money like that.

Ellen was glancing at the pouch filled with gold.

Did she think nothing more of that money than she would of a sack of rice or something?

* * *

Evening time.

If there was one difference from before, it would be that Ellen could eat with the other girls again.

And I was included in that. Of course, Ellen still wasn’t much of a talker, and she had little to no reaction to things. She mostly tended to leave Liana and Harriet to do the talking and Adelia to react to them.

I also wasn’t the type of person to say anything unless someone talked to me first. The kids also knew that I was like a broken vending machine that would only give rude answers even if they put a coin in it, so they didn’t really talk to me often.

On that note…

“I want to ask you something.”

Rather unusually, Ellen was the first to talk. She wasn’t looking towards me, but towards Liana and Harriet.

“Yes, go ahead.”

"This is the first time Ellen is asking me something. Yes. What is it?”

Both of them were surprised as Ellen did something she didn’t usually do, which was strange. Ellen nodded her head, seeming slightly troubled with something.

“You have a lot of money, right?”

“Money? Well… I guess so? Same would go for Harriet.”

Duke Grantz had villas all over the continent.

And the young lady of the Saint-Owan Grand Duchy, Harriet, was more of a princess than a mere noble to begin with.

Asking those two if they had money was the same as asking a human if they were breathing. It was obvious. But why was she asking about money so suddenly?

“If you have a lot of money, what do you do with it?”

That girl…

What should I do with that stuff in my room before dinner? What should I do to spend that money well?

It looked like she was struggling with those questions.

I imagined Ellen struggling like that all alone in her room, which would be kind of cute. I didn’t think that kid would do that, though.

What did one do with a lot of money?

The two of them were a little startled because they didn’t know Ellen, of all people, would ask them such a question.

“Ah… The reward you received from the Adventurer’s Guild. Is it about that?”

The additional reward we received was also rather high. We got it through Mr. Epinhauser the day before. However, that was just a cute amount for the two of us.

“Additionally, there is the money we got from selling precious metals and such. We got so much money that I don’t know what to do with it.”

“How much?”

“More than a thousand.”

A thousand gold coins.

“Cough! Cough, cough! Cough!”

“A-Adelia! Are you okay?”

“Drink some water!”

While listening carefully, it seemed like Adelia was so surprised to the point her eyes almost popped out, and she started coughing like that.

She calmed down, her face flushed red, after she drank some water.

1000 gold coins…

Over a billion won.

“It’s quite a lot…”

“Yeah…”

Even Harriet and Liana didn’t deny that it was quite a lot of money. The amount itself probably wasn’t much to them, but we earned it in a single go. Of course, as they knew the details, they were aware that it wasn’t earned easily.

What did they do when they had too much money?

Where did they usually spend their money?

Ellen seemed curious about those things.

"Well… I would buy some magic tools or rare magic stones to research them… I think. While this certainly is a large amount of money, I think it’ll be quickly used up if you go with that.”

“Yeeah… I also often think that I’d like to do that if I had a lot of money.”

Adelia agreed to Harriet’s words. Temple provided various items as support, but that

investment wasn't unlimited. It was clear that there were quite a lot of things that they couldn't do due to their financial limitations.

Those of the magic major had a lot of things they could spend their money on, but Ellen wasn't a wizard.

"I usually buy clothes and other stuff. Although you made quite a lot of money, I also think that it'll be used up soon if you do that."

You bastard, we're talking about a billion!

You're telling me you would just spend all that on clothes? Would you even be able to wear all that?!

I managed to hold back my retorts, almost jumping at Liana's words which would make any commoner cringe hard.

Anyway, Liana seemed to be able to spend large sums of money on her own personal hobbies and preferences.

"…That reminds me."

Harriet hesitantly opened her mouth after listening to Liana. When she said it, I also realized something.

"Ellen, you don't have any other clothes besides your school uniform, right?"

"I have more."

Ellen pointed at the clothes she was wearing. Liana and Harriet looked rather pale at her words.

"…I mean, casual clothes that aren't training clothes."

Harriet was right.

Ellen was always either wearing her school uniform or a training suit. She didn't have any casual clothes. I had never seen her wear anything like that, at least.

Even right at that moment, Ellen was just wearing her training suit.

After class, all of us changed into our casual clothes and decided to roam around.

Adelia wore a gray dress, Harriet wore a luxurious lacey black dress, and Liana wore trousers and a blouse.

We didn't really agree to dress up, but everyone ended up wearing their casual clothes.

However, Ellen was still dressed in just a tracksuit, and it had almost the same design as the one she wore earlier. There weren't that many differences in tracksuits anyway.

Liana just opened her mouth blankly as if she came to the same realization again.

"Don't you have any normal one-piece dresses?"

"…No."

The only time I saw Ellen wearing skirts was when she wore her school uniform. Liana grabbed Ellen's hand as she entered her berserk mode.

"I can't leave you like that. Let's go buy some clothes."

"?"

Liana had bought her a swimsuit the other day because she couldn't bear seeing Ellen in her school swimsuit. Next, it seemed that she was bothered by the fact that Ellen didn't have any proper casual clothes. Liana decided to shop for some casual clothes for Ellen; that was when she looked towards me.

"Hey, you, come along as well."

"…What? Why me? I didn't ask you how I should spend my money, you know?"

Liana frowned at my words.

"How are you any different? You only ever wear your uniform and your tracksuit as well."

Just as Ellen didn't own any skirts and such of her own, I didn't even have a proper

pair of pants other than the ones from my training clothes.

Although we were of different genders, my and Ellen's clothing styles were exactly the same.

I mean, why would one need casual clothes if the only thing one did all day long was train? I wouldn't even have a chance to wear them anyway, right?

Ah.

I was pretty sure that Ellen was thinking the same thing.

"Anyway, we'll go shopping tomorrow after class. We'll meet up in the dormitory."

Was it just my hallucination when I felt like Liana de Grantz had the most authority right then?

* * *

I had meditation, supernatural power control, and supernatural power practice classes on Wednesday. Meditation and supernatural power control were classes I already had in my first semester.

The previous day's practical swordsmanship class consisted of performing actual combat with a summoned practice dummy. There were also some cases where they summoned monsters, so it was literally a class where we fought against remote-controlled dolls with our swordsmanship. It was simply fighting against golems holding swords.

Supernatural power practice was just another version of that; it was also Royal Class-only.

There were a total of six supernatural power users in the Royal Class Year 1.

Liana, Kono Lint, Charlotte, Heinrich, Ibia, and me.

Those who take that class possessed offensive abilities.

Class B's Ibia had telepathic abilities, so she didn't take the class, as she hadn't discovered an offensive use for her powers yet.

Although she would later on, no one knew that yet.

Of course, in Kono Lint's case, his teleportation ability was a little vague.

Depending on how one used it, there were ways to use Teleportation offensively. However, due to the fatal side effect of his ability, appearing naked, he couldn't take part in the practical classes.

Of course, all of Royal Class' supernatural power users had improved in their own ways, so Kono Lint's ability should have improved as well.

Before the supernatural power practice class…

The supernatural power control class.

-Oh… Ooh! Lint! Unbelievable! For that to be possible!

-T-teacher…! I did it! I finally… finally did it!

-Well, still! Don't… Don't come any closer to me wearing just that!

-Urgh… Uuh. Yes…

Kono Lint was sharing some intense emotions with the teacher in charge of the closed-off classroom where he usually practiced his ability.

"…What's going on?"

"Who knows?"

After completing her ability test, Liana heard Kono Lint making a fuss and turned to look away.

I didn't see Charlotte anywhere around, as she might have still had her lessons somewhere else.

-*Bang!*

“Everyone! Good news!”

Then, Kono Lint’s training teacher opened the door to the closed-off room and cried out, their voice filled with emotion.

“Our… our Lint! Lint can finally…! He can finally teleport together with his underwear!”

At those words, everyone in the class stopped what they were doing, even the teachers in charge had bewildered expressions on their faces.

It came as a great shock to everyone.

“Re-re… Really?!”

“Yes, Ms. Lelin! It’s not a coincidence either! I did it three times in a row!”

“This… this can’t be!”

That’s right.

Kono Lint’s ability had evolved so that he could teleport along with his underwear after rigorous training!

“Kuh… Kuhuk…”

Kono Lint, who seemed to have gathered all of his clothes, was so moved that tears came out of his eyes as he covered his mouth. Heinrich and Ibia were also astonished by his remarkable growth.

That ability, which forced him to give up all of his dignity to use, now only required him to give up about 90% of it.

Liana looked rather pale as if she had fallen into a daze.

“It feels… really incredible… What is this feeling…?”

That fatal side effect had finally disappeared, so it was only right to celebrate.

But… it was rather subtle.

I definitely remembered that part. From then on, Kono Lint's ability would continue to evolve.

He was able to teleport with his underwear, but later on, he would be able to teleport with all his clothes on. His ability would increase in power to the point where he wouldn't have to give up his dignity anymore.

However, going by how it progressed…

I guessed that his next evolution would make him able to teleport with his socks or something.

Kono Lint, who succeeded in teleporting with his underwear, eventually would be able to teleport along with his socks as well, but I didn't know if it would be the socks or not.

"I… I… I knew I could do it…!"

However, at the moment, we couldn't help but cheer for Kono Lint, who was so greatly moved by the moment.

It was such a strange moment that seemed both happy and yet sad.

Anyway, that day's protagonist was Kono Lint.

CHAPTER 186

His ability would continue to develop.

However, Kono Lint still couldn't participate in the subsequent practical class. He only managed to teleport with his underwear, but his offensive abilities were still the worst.

In fact, even if he managed to teleport along with a weapon, his skills wouldn't even be enough to twist a child's wrist.

Except for Ibia and Kono Lint, there were four people participating in the practical class:

Charlotte, Heinrich, Liana, and me.

As soon as the class started, Charlotte went off somewhere alone. Her abilities had been strong enough to defeat an orc by herself when we were undertaking the mission on the deserted island.

The performance should be outstanding in practice.

Heinrich was busy dodging and rolling around in the practical class, probably because of the activation time of his ability.

"Hyuok… Huuk! Hyuok!"

-Flare! Flare! (SFX for fire igniting)

He wasn't able to hit the goblin in front of him, although he was able to keep it from approaching by setting fire to the area around him.

In Liana's case…

-Flash! Bang!

When she hit the goblins, who were either rushing at her or standing still, with her lightning bolt, they would disappear like smoke. As if the time when her range was barely five meters was a lie, her output and range had increased tremendously.

When we were on the deserted island, Liana's ability wasn't even able to properly damage the orcs.

However, with her current abilities in the practical class, those orcs would have been thoroughly roasted as soon as they came closer to her.

No matter how I looked at it, that was totally a cheat skill.

Lightning…

Lightning sure was invincible…

What I did was simple.

-Baam!

The summoned goblin simply disappeared in a puff of smoke after I kicked its head as it was rushing towards me.

"…I don't know whether your supernatural power or your body has grown stronger."

My teacher told me that they didn't know whether it was my physical abilities that improved or my supernatural ability.

* * *

After my classes on Wednesday, Liana de Grantz and I went back to our dormitory together. All of us would meet up at the dorm to go shopping, after all, so there was no reason to go back separately.

Ellen had awakened her magic body strengthening too early, so I knew that she was taking private lessons. She should be taking a lot of classes related to that topic. I didn't really know if they were all taught by that yoga master-like teacher. though.

After returning to the dorm and waiting for a bit, Harriet and Adelia returned. They both went back to their rooms and changed into some casual clothes before coming out again.

"Did you put on makeup?"

"Yes, and?"

When I asked her that after noticing that Harriet's lip color had changed slightly, she nodded. I didn't know exactly how and where she applied her makeup, but she felt somewhat different from usual.

"I heard that it's best to apply makeup in a way that isn't noticeable."

Harriet glared at me when I uttered those words.

"…So, are you trying to make fun of me for not being good at applying makeup now?"

"No, I was going to say that you did a good job…"

Why did she think that I would always be on the offensive? Her face flushed red at my words.

"Well… I mean. I didn't do it to hear something like that from you or anything, okay?"

No.

If she said something like that, my tongue would just begin to move on its own.

"I was just saying that to make you feel better about yourself as well, you know?"

"Feel better about myself?"

"Don't you feel good? Aren't you grinning from ear to ear because I praised you?"

"I'm not grinning from ear to ear! And I don't feel good because of that either!"

“Even if I praise you for being good at applying your makeup, you get angry. What’s your problem, girl?”

“Argh! You’re so annoying!”

Harriet eventually came to the realization that talking to me was a waste of time, so she stuck herself to Liana’s side.

“Isn’t it about time that you realize that just exchanging more than five words with that guy will make you mad?”

“Urg!”

Liana patted Harriet on the shoulder as if trying to make her realize that trying to deal with me was just a huge waste of time.

Anyway, after waiting for a bit longer Ellen was the last one to arrive at the dorm.

* * *

Liana told us that she only rarely went to buy clothes directly to begin with.

In most cases, they were custom made, or she would just contact a boutique, telling them to bring some clothes to her from which she would buy some she liked.

That was the way of rich people.

Another rich person, Harriet, said that she didn’t really care that much about clothes. If it was just a new robe she needed, she would just have someone make her one according to her current size.

Although she didn’t look like that at all, Harriet was quite the nerd. A nerd that only put her everything into exploring the subject she majored in.

She wasn’t as extreme as Ellen, but Harriet was also the type of person who would only focus on her major, so it didn’t seem like she had a lot of casual clothes either.

Adelia was also a nerd and an ordinary student who lived on the allowance given to her by Temple, but she had no interest in buying anything fancy with it.

Anyway…

With the exception of Liana de Grantz, who brought us along with her, almost none of us would go out to buy clothes or were interested in them. I wasn't particularly interested in that stuff either.

"It sure has been a long time since I've come here in person."

That was what Liana said when we arrived at the luxury street lined with multiple clothing stores. Although there were many clothing stores within Temple, Liana wanted to really go out to shop.

"Ellen, if you just close your eyes and buy stuff here, don't you think a thousand gold coins would disappear in no time?"

What the hell were they trying to buy?

Even though it wasn't my money, I already felt like it would be a huge waste.

* * *

Of course, that time, Liana wouldn't be the one buying stuff for us. We would buy clothes with our own money as we went around to shop. Ellen was rather blind when it came to fashion, so she stuck close to Liana, who recommended her various things.

As she went around the various shops, she was busy trying on and buying a lot of different clothes. I also didn't have any casual clothes, so I wasn't really any better than her, so I also bought a few clothes that caught my eye.

"…Try them on before you buy them."

"They should be about right, though."

"Are you guys twins? How can you actually end up saying the exact same thing?"

Liana seemed to be shocked that both Ellen and I bought our clothes without trying them on, estimating that they should fit. It looked like she even started to

hypothesize that we were actually twins who had been separated at birth.

Harriet and Adelia also bought some clothes.

"…"

Harriet looked at herself in the mirror after she put on a dress, some other clothes, and shoes. Then, wearing a white dress and some pink shoes, she made eye contact with me as she looked into the mirror.

"…Don't say anything."

Her face was flushed red out of embarrassment. Why? It did look good on her, though? Did she think I wouldn't be able to resist picking a fight with her?

"…"

She told me to not say anything, so I just kept my mouth shut.

"…I did tell you not to say anything, but you really aren't saying anything!"

"…What do you want me to do, you punk?!"

"If you're not going to say anything, why do you keep st-staring at me like that?!"

It seemed like she got annoyed because I kept staring at her in silence.

"Will it kill you if I look at you? I was looking because it suits you! It's cute! Huh?!"

"Wha-what?! Why are you complimenting me in such an angry voice?!"

Harriet's lips twitched as I complimented her, although my tone was rather harsh. Eventually, she trembled a bit and ran into the dressing room.

"Hey. Hey. Come here."

Liana called out to me suddenly.

"Why?"

“Shut up and look at this.”

Liana dragged me to where Ellen was.

“…I feel naked.”

Perhaps feeling a little awkward in that outfit, she tugged on the hem of her dress.

* * *

Ellen was wearing a black, shoulderless, frilly dress, and her feet were encased in black enamel shoes. Because of her naturally white skin, the contrast between her white legs and the black dress was very eye-catching.

If Harriet was cute, then Ellen was breathtaking.

“Why do you always only wear tracksuits when you look so good?”

Liana murmured as she looked at Ellen vacantly. She looked wistful as if thinking: “I can’t believe she let her potential rot away like that!”

“This stuff is uncomfortable.”

Ellen looked quite uncomfortable wearing such revealing clothes, no matter how good they looked on her. She made eye contact with me. Harriet told me not to say anything just then, but suddenly Ellen was the one who looked at me without saying anything.

‘Should I say something?’

Of course, even if I didn’t say anything, Liana would continue to talk all on her own.

“Hey, just look at her waist. Where is all your strength actually coming from?”

When she touched Ellen’s waistline, Liana was more than stunned. Surprised by her thin waist, she seemed unable to comprehend how she could be the current No. 1 in terms of physical stats in the Royal Class.

“No, I mean, you eat so much to begin with, so how does it make sense for your waist to be like that?”

It seemed like Liana was starting to question the fallacy of this world’s laws of physics.

‘…This is my fault. I’m sorry.’

“Why aren’t you saying anything?”

"…Huh?"

Ellen posed a question towards me all of a sudden, as I was looking away not saying anything. What? Did she want me to tell her that she looked good? Liana grinned when I was acting a bit dumb and not replying.

"So that's what it is."

Liana looked at me as she wrapped one hand around Ellen's waist.

"She's usually only sweating while swinging a sword around with you, but seeing her wearing these kinds of clothes… Hm? What is it? Does she seem different to you?"

"Wha-what the hell are you talking about?! Shut up!"

What was that brat talking about?!

"What? Cat got your tongue? Come on, say something. 'It suits you well.', 'You're pretty.' Don't you have anything to say? Why can't you even say these simple words?"

"Shut up! It's not like that."

That's not how it was! What I felt was a bit more complex. I couldn't explain it properly!

"It looks good on you, yeah."

"…Is that so?"

What would she do next?

Ellen ended up buying those clothes.

* * *

After shopping, everyone returned to Temple, having bought a lot of clothes. All of us wore some of our new clothes on our way back to Temple, and our respective closets were filled to the brim

"This, try this on."

“…Annoying.”

“No, why don’t you try this on?”

“…Okay."

Not returning to her own room, Liana followed Ellen into her room and made her try on one piece of clothing after the other.

This was also the day Liana de Grantz found out a new fact…

It was quite fun dressing someone else up. With a model in front of her that looked good in anything she wore, she kept on getting greedier as well. She couldn’t believe that Ellen would only ever wear the uniform or tracksuits. Liana firmly believed that it was a total waste of potential.

While trying on skirts, one-pieces, accessories, and boots, Ellen expressed her annoyance, but Liana’s tension was so high that she couldn’t brush her off.

“Oh, let’s go buy some more dress gowns later. You’d look absolutely stunning in them.”

“Dress gowns?”

Liana wanted to see her in a proper dress gown, not just a casual outfit.

Liana was sure that everyone would see the exercise addict in a different light.

“Yeah, that Reinhardt, you saw how he went dumb when he saw you wearing that one-piece today. How mindblown do you think he’ll be if he sees you in a dress gown?”

Reinhardt’s reaction was also very interesting. It was strangely refreshing seeing him unable to even make eye contact with Ellen.

“…Why?”

However, Ellen only tilted her head at Liana’s words. It was as if he didn’t understand how her wearing a dress gown and Reinhardt correlated. Liana stared at her.

Am I wrong?

“Don’t you like Reinhardt?”

“…?”

Ellen tilted her head to the other side.

“Then do you dislike him?”

“No, I don’t dislike him.”

Ellen remained silent for a while before she spoke once more.

“I think I like him… but I’m not really sure if it’s like that.”

“Ah… I know what you mean.”

They just thought of each other as very close friends. Liana didn’t know them for that long, but as she observed Ellen, she realized that although her abilities were incredibly excellent, she was very clumsy and inexperienced in a few areas.

She liked Reinhardt, but she didn’t know whether she liked him as a person of the opposite sex or not.

She had never loved someone like that, after all. Ellen definitely liked Reinhardt, but she didn’t know where to place her feelings.

Liana grinned.

“Hmm… Do you get nervous when you’re with him? Did you ever… feel like that?”

“Not at all.”

She had felt nervous before… When she had to kill for the first time together with Reinhardt when they were in the Darklands or when she had to fight the swarm of zombies. However, Ellen knew that she wasn’t asking about something like that.

Still, she had never felt nervous around Reinhardt.

“Did your heart ever pound at the thought of your fingers touching or did you ever tremble when your bodies were close to each other?”

“Never.”

In the first place, their daily routine was practicing their swordsmanship together, so that was normal.

Reinhardt would start shaking a lot.

However, that was just out of exhaustion. He couldn’t put any strength into his limbs anymore.

By the end of the training, he would be very shaky.

Liana, who showed more and more interest in the topic, slowly cooled down.

“Don’t you feel anxious for no apparent reason or do things you usually don't do? Something like that?”

“…No.”

“Don’t you feel annoyed or upset when he gets closer to other girls?”

“Not at all.”

Ellen had never really felt that way. She felt comfortable when she was with Reinhardt. She had no reason to feel nervous around him. Liana sighed with a grim expression on her face.

“I thought there was something between you two after you went to the Darklands, but there’s nothing in the slightest. You guys are just normal friends, well, I don’t know how Reinhardt feels about you, but I’m sure that’s all you see him as.”

Liana sat across Ellen’s bed, exhausted, saying that Ellen just confirmed that she really thought of Reinhardt as just a friend.

“Do you feel like that when you fall in love?”

Getting nervous for no reason, getting upset if they get closer to others, and doing

things one usually didn't do.

Ellen was wondering whether Liana's words were true, that one would act like that if they fell in love. Liana seemed to ponder for a while; then her expression suddenly turned blank.

"Right."

"…?"

"Come to think of it. I've never loved anyone either. I mostly read all of these things in romance novels and such."

Liana de Grantz suddenly realized that she had never fallen in love herself and yet she said that one would feel upset and nervous if one were to love someone.

"…"

"…"

A kid who didn't even know enough about the topic to teach another was arguing about it as if she was an expert.

Ellen thought about Reinhardt.

'It looks good on you, yeah.'

That was what he had said when he had seen her wear clothes she usually wouldn't.

She couldn't really put it into words, but when he said that, she felt rather strange around her chest, a little ticklish. It was a weird feeling she had never felt before.

Was that proof?

'Probably not', Ellen thought.

CHAPTER 187

The evening after we went shopping…

-Kaaang! Kang!

“You’re dead.”

“…”

In the end, we, wearing training clothes and sparring in the training room, didn’t really change. I did buy casual clothes, but I had no idea if I would ever get to wear them. I was wondering whether the day would come where I would be able to wear the things I bought that day even once.

Like always, there were the usual three people in the training room.

Cliffman, Ellen, and me.

Ellen and I were sparring, and Cliffman was training on his own. Occasionally, Cliffman and I would have some sparring matches. Of course, it still felt rather awkward though. However, he couldn’t even make eye contact with Ellen. That guy’s awkwardness came close to a genuine illness.

After fighting for a while and finally getting pushed to my limits, I lay down on the gym floor.

I was still no match for her. Of course, Ellen was a lot stronger than me, so it couldn’t be helped.

Ellen sat down next to me, who had lain down.

“What’s the matter? Got something to say?”

She didn’t actually say anything, but it felt like she wanted to talk about something, so I asked her. After staying silent for a long time, Ellen finally opened her mouth.

“Have you ever liked someone?”

“Why are you asking me that so suddenly?”

“No reason. I’m just curious.”

That question went far beyond what I was expecting.

Had I ever loved someone? Of course, there should have been a time. Before I entered this body, that is.

“Yeah.”

But… well, being seventeen didn’t mean I couldn’t have had my first love already, so that was what I answered. It wasn’t really weird, after all.

“Then how did it feel?”

Ellen didn’t seem particularly surprised.

“…Felt like shit.”

“Felt like shit?”

“Yeah, it felt like shit.”

I didn’t know about those that started dating after going through some heart-pounding ups and downs, but if one were to fall in love and the other person didn’t reciprocate the feelings, wouldn’t that feel like shit?

“…Aren't you supposed to feel happy?”

Ellen stared at me as if she couldn’t understand why I would say that it felt like shit. I sat up from my lying state and looked at Ellen.

“Well. Let’s think about this.”

“…Yes.”

“There’s someone who always appears in your dreams. They are the first thing you

think about in the morning, while you're eating, and while you're working. Just being with them is nice, and if it feels good just to make eye contact with them, while they are still the only thing filling your mind."

"…?"

"But what's this? They are already dating someone? And no matter what you do, they'd never be interested in you? They just treat you like a piece of trash. Or are they maybe treating you like some annoying guy that keeps talking to them? What about if they start avoiding you?"

"????"

"Wouldn't that feel like shit?"

'Love feels like shit, you punk! It's a disease! Unrequited love is the worst plague!'

Ellen tilted her head at my sudden show of disgust.

"Did you get dumped?"

"That's what happens after you confess, you know? I couldn't even do that. You get it?"

What crazy bastard would confess to someone when they were sure to get dumped?! One would just keep on praying all alone before one eventually forgot about it.

"…Anyway, you know what it feels like to love someone."

"Yeah. Still, why are you so curious all of a sudden?"

Ellen stayed silent for a while, then grabbed my hand that was placed on the floor. It wasn't anything new to me that she would lean on my shoulders once or twice those days.

"Do you feel anxious?"

"…What?"

"Are you trembling?"

“What the hell are you talking about? Why should I? I don’t have any hand tremors or anything, you know?”

When I drank too much to the point that I could be called an alcoholic, I would tremble a little as if anxious, but not with this body! It shouldn’t be like that! No hair loss or hand tremors. I was reborn!

“I’m not trembling either.”

Ellen nodded to herself as if she had confirmed something.

What was wrong with her?

Did she eat something wrong?

* * *

After our evening training, Ellen changed her clothes in a private room. After that, she went to the dining room to eat something.

It was her fixed routine to eat late-night snacks with Reinhardt. Unless Reinhardt was particularly busy, it was common for them to always eat together like that.

Liana de Grantz said that when she fell for someone, she would get anxious and tremble when she was with the other person.

Ellen had never felt that way when she was dealing with Reinhardt.

Reinhardt said that when he fell for someone, he would dream about them and would think of them all the time. And he said if they weren’t interested in him, he would feel like shit. He seemed to have an intense dislike for the fact that he fell for someone.

On the other hand, Ellen didn’t think of Reinhardt wherever she was. She didn’t particularly care if they made eye contact or not.

So she had just grabbed his hand to make sure, but Reinhardt himself wasn’t even shaking or anything.

Like usual. He didn’t mind.

So Ellen came to her conclusion quite easily:

She liked Reinhardt, but not in that way.

That was what Ellen thought.

She didn't know much about herself, but when she combined both of their accounts with her own feelings, she came to said conclusion.

However, there was another question arising in her mind:

We're just friends, but haven't I been much too friendly with Reinhardt?

She obviously had done a lot of things with Reinhardt that she wouldn't have done with a normal friend, and she still did.

Am I perhaps acting strange?

Ellen inadvertently came to such a realization. She didn't know how to deal with people, so she also didn't know what the proper distance to keep between them would be. She didn't know where the line in human relationships was, so she thought that there were a few moments where she had accidentally crossed it.

Liana was obviously surprised when she found out that Ellen just thought of Reinhardt as a friend.

That was the first time that Ellen thought that what she did with Reinhardt was a little strange.

She arrived at the dining room and was about to enter but stopped when she noticed that there was some noise coming from inside.

-If you eat a lot at night, you'll gain weight!

-Well, then you just have to work out more.

-Why do you keep telling me to eat when I don't want to!? I'm not hungry, you know?

-You're talking a lot for someone who got dragged here after eating snacks in the magic lab. Don't make a fuss, and eat properly!

-Urg! I-I didn't though?

-Huuh, how about brushing off the crumbs from your mouth first?

Harriet and Reinhardt were arguing. As always, Harriet ended up with a burning red face. Reinhardt was grinning while teasing her.

Ellen was watching them quietly.

-Anyway, I thought you were hungry, so I brought you here to eat together, but if you don't want to eat, oh well.

It seemed like she had been eating something in the magic lab when Reinhardt dragged her there, thinking that if she was going to eat something, they might as well do it together. As soon as he brought Harriet, there they started fighting.

It happened from time to time. Just like Ellen and Reinhardt would train until late at night, Harriet would stay in the magic lab for that long.

At the words "If you don't want to eat", Harriet sat at the table, her lips pressed together.

-… I'll see what you made, at least.

-Sure, wait a sec.

Ellen alternately looked at Reinhardt's back as he entered the kitchen, and Harriet, whose face was slightly flushed, from the entrance of the dining room.

She had no particular thoughts when she saw Reinhardt being close with others.

Why wouldn't she like it if her friends were getting along with each other?

"Oh, Ellen."

"Yes."

Ellen entered the dining room and sat opposite Harriet. Harriet, whose face was still slightly flushed, twisted her lips slightly.

"I told him I didn’t want to eat anything, but he still forced me to come here. That bastard.”

Harriet shook her head in exasperation.

Ellen looked at Harriet silently.

A slightly flushed face…

A sharp and high-pitched tone of voice…

She also seemed to tremble slightly.

Ellen had a good impression of Harriet de Saint-Owan. Originally, she didn't have any opinion about her. They were strangers before, after all. However, as they started to get along, she was able to get to know many aspects of Harriet.

She didn’t know how she used to be, but it seemed that at some point, Harriet stopped doing things like looking down on others, trying to reveal her identity, or bragging about her talent.

When she was talking to Adelia, her friend but also a commoner, she would immediately apologize if she made a mistake while still speaking to her comfortably without being too considerate. She tried not to say any hurtful things to begin with.

When Ellen, Harriet, and Adelia were planning on going out somewhere. she felt like she would leave out Liana, so she also invited her to come with them.

She was someone who knew how to care about the people around her.

She was different from herself.

When she was with her friends, she tended to direct the mood and also kept conversations going. There was almost nothing she didn’t know about magic as well.

However…

When she was around Reinhardt, she behaved a little differently. She didn’t act sweet or kind, and they were almost always fighting. Of course, it would always be Reinhardt who teased her first.

She only acted differently towards Reinhardt. She didn't act like that when she was dealing with anyone else. There were things she would say or do only when Reinhardt was around.

She became completely different from her usual self when she came across Reinhardt.

"Anyway… I appreciate that he tries to take care of me, but that guy sure isn't that appreciative of others, huh."

Her face was slightly more flushed, and a subtle smile that only appeared when she talked about Reinhardt without him around decorated her lips.

Ellen wasn't able to understand her own mind.

It's probably not like that, she thought.

"What is he making?"

"Well…"

However, she could clearly see that Harriet de Saint-Owan liked Reinhardt.

If so, what about herself?

She just couldn't figure it out.

However, if she were to treat Reinhardt as casually as she had up to then, it would hurt Harriet.

That was what Ellen thought.

* * *

Thursday…

Mr. Epinhauser soon told me the answer to the question I asked him previously about the cursed sword.

"Your suggestion that we should investigate the true origins of this sword through

sorcery has been accepted."

We would use an unknown power to learn more about that mysterious sword—that was the decision Temple seemed to have made. I wasn't sure, however, if Dettomolian would be able to find out the origins of that sword through his sorcery.

Of course, I wouldn't have to be present for the investigation myself—I would just have to wait for the results. I didn't know what kind of ritual he would carry out, but I was sure that it would take some time to get results.

"A ritual will be held in the temple of Towan, inside Temple."

In order to prepare for any unforeseen disasters, priests and wizards would try everything to prevent any unclean energy from flowing to the outside world.

That was why they were using such a sacred place to facilitate the ritual and why they let such an unclean object enter Temple.

"Can I attend?"

"Hmm… I don't know if this is something you really need to see. As long as you keep your distance, your presence might not matter."

Even though I figured it wouldn't be necessary for me to be there in person, I still decided to go there because I might have to use my Revision skill in case something unexpected occurred.

* * *

Thursday night…

When Ellen heard that a ritual involving the cursed sword would be carried out, she followed me, saying that she wanted to see it as well. Dettomolian had missed all of his classes to prepare for the ritual.

There were temples for all the Five Great Deities erected inside Temple. The ritual would be held in the temple of Saint-Owan, the God of Purity.

Ellen and I took the tram and headed towards Saint-Owan's Temple.

“I hope everything will turn out fine.”

Ellen voiced her concerns.

“It should be.”

If something we brought led to a huge accident in Temple, it would be entirely my responsibility. After all, it was me who dragged that thing, which disposing of or throwing away might not be enough to deal with it, there.

Those who majored in divine powers would go to that place a lot, but that was Ellen’s and my first time seeing the inside of one of those temples inside of Temple. The Temple of Saint-Owan looked more like a huge church than a temple, though.

Its huge front door stood wide open, but they strictly controlled who was going in.

We were able to enter after showing our Student IDs, as we had received permission to attend the event prior.

After passing through a few corridors and walking through another huge door, our eyes fell on a dome-shaped chapel.

In the middle of it was a statue of the God of Purity Towan. That cursed sword was capable of unleashing its power to raise the dead.

Therefore, it had been decided to do the ritual there because they thought the temple of Towan was filled with a power that was its complete opposite and—in conclusion—capable of suppressing it.

The dome-shaped chapel was crowded with people; almost all of them were Temple officials.

There were also many people wearing priest cloaks and wizards around. Everyone was busy preparing various things because they didn’t know what might happen.

They prepared protection measures with magical and divine power in advance in case of possible accidents.

All I could think was that all of those people were troubled because of something I had brought with me.

And as the priests were doing their jobs, they would glance at the center of the chapel with anxious expressions.

The center of the ritual…

The cursed sword was floating about 30 centimeters above the ground of the chapel.

It looked like it was stuck in some sort of crystal. It seemed like some sort of magic was applied to it, and yet it was different.

Dettomoluian was there moving slowly and doing something.

"…It feels ominous."

"…Yeah."

Both Ellen and I couldn't help but have the same evaluation of the situation. I had no other choice but to realize why the priests kept staring at me like that until my back started to itch.

That bastard was drawing an unidentified shamanistic circle with blood on the floor.

He drew an unidentifiable shamanistic circle with blood inside the Temple of Towan, the God of Purity, and to top it off, in front of the god's statue! I didn't know what kind of blood that was, but I saw another bucket filled with the same crimson fresh blood to the side.

I wondered whether Dettomolian had any awareness that what he did was something that could be called blasphemy itself.

All of us were doing those things after getting permission from Temple, but they still had an unsure expression on their faces, wondering whether it was really okay to do something like that in a place like that. If that was what we felt, then just how were the priests feeling about it?

The magic circle was quite simple, completely different from the complex circles I had seen on scrolls. Why were those lines so crooked?

I thought that maybe they were supposed to look like that, so I investigated a bit, but that didn't seem to be the case. Then I looked at Dettomolian and muttered blankly.

"…Are his hands shaking?"

"…Will it be fine?"

"I-I don't know…"

Did I think wrong?

Dettomolian was nervous, so his hands shook a little, but the lines sure seemed very messed up. My hands started to shake as well.

Would things turn out well?

CHAPTER 188

People were standing around the chapel. Regardless of how many safety measures had been prepared, we observers were watching that scene from the furthest edges of the chapel.

As the priest chanted protective spells, a sacred kind of atmosphere enveloped the chapel.

The whole chapel was surrounded by a soothing atmosphere, making one feel like everything would end without any mishaps.

Then, Dettomolian, who was sitting cross-legged before the cursed sword, began to mumble something.

I didn't know the details, but I guessed that him doing so would start the ritual. I hoped I could figure out that cursed sword's origins and if the curse on it could be broken.

Everyone felt nervous, and we were too far from the center of the chapel to clearly hear the contents of his mutterings.

I might have been able to hear it if I strengthened my hearing, but I didn't really want to.

A long time passed.

However, nothing really happened.

"…"

"…"

Ellen and I made eye contact, but we couldn't really chat in that solemn atmosphere.

However, our thoughts were the same.

When will this end?

About an hour after the ritual started, Dettomolian was still mumbling something and the people standing around were still invoking protective measures.

Now that I think of it, it kind of reminded me of when I visited Dettomolian's Occult Research Club with Charlotte.

At that time, Charlotte had said it was too dark in the room, so I had asked if I could turn on the lights, and that was when Dettomolian had said something.

If you do that, the ritual will end.

He said that we could turn on the lights, but then he would have to go through a week-long ritual again.

No, wouldn't that mean that the ritual wouldn't just end in few hours but would take a few days or even weeks? If so, the people assigned to the place would end up dying because of exhaustion. Could Dettomolian even stop in the middle to eat and drink something?

I didn't know how many hours it had been since I arrived there.

I couldn't ask Dettomolian or the priests and wizards about those things anymore. I couldn't disturb them, as all of them had to fully concentrate on their task.

When I thought about going out, I saw that the chapel doors were firmly closed.

I was thinking that I could just open them and leave.

We could do that, but…

"…"

"…"

Could it be that if we opened the chapel door, we would ruin the ritual, or that we would distract Dettomolian, leading him to make mistakes?

It was so quiet that everyone would hear it if we were to slip out.

Ellen and I ended up locked in that prison from which no one could leave until the ritual was over.

Ellen and I sat side by side on a bench in the chapel, watching the ritual intently.

* * *

Time advanced past midnight, and we were unable to return to the dormitory.

Ellen seemed to be about to doze off, as she was very tired. Usually, she would just lean against me and fall asleep.

I didn't want to see her swaying around like that anymore, so I just pulled her towards me and laid her head on my lap. That was all. Those types of things were nothing much to her or me anymore.

"…"

Ellen woke up slightly, looked up at me, and tried to get up.

I pressed her head back down, conveying to her that she should just sleep if she felt tired.

"…"

Ellen seemed to resist a little, but then simply gave up and closed her eyes.

That kind of casual physical contact had become a lot easier for both of us.

It wasn't anything bad, but…

'What's with this?'

I had that strange feeling as if we simply skipped the dating phase and straight-up turned into a married couple that had been together for 10 years already.

The ritual was still in progress, and fatigue was slowly manifesting on the priests' and wizards' faces.

Unlike what they had feared, the cursed sword didn't emit any kind of ferocious

energy and just kept on maintaining its original state.

The only proof that the ritual was still in progress was that Dettomolian was still continuing to mumble something.

At first, I thought he was weak, but in fact, he wasn't.

Although I could only look at him from far away, I couldn't see a trace of tiredness or exhaustion on his face.

Many hours after it started, Dettomolian continued to do the ritual in the same posture in which he started.

In many different ways, that guy was amazing as well.

In the end, I couldn't win against my exhaustion and fell asleep while sitting.

* * *

It was someone's shout that woke Ellen and me.

"Stop! Stop it now!"

"!"

Of course, Ellen and I woke up because of that sudden roar.

A high priest who appeared to be in control of this operation exclaimed loudly.

"Any more than this will be dangerous! You have to stop!"

Colorful lights were shining down upon us through the stained glass of the dome. It was morning already. However, Ellen and I couldn't help but focus our attention on what we could see happening under the light pouring through the stained glass windows.

A strange black energy rose up from the cursed sword and was wiggling threateningly under the vibrant light.

It was a huge amount of black energy, comparable in size to the statue of Towan.

Everyone was anxiously watching that bizarre energy moving about as if it was alive.

"Still, it takes time to… terminate it…"

“U-understood. Just hurry. Come on. Stop it. I don’t know what’s going to happen if this keeps going.”

It seemed that the bizarre energy getting emitted from the sword hadn’t cause any accidents yet, but it kept on growing bigger and bigger, so they seemed to be convinced that the ritual shouldn’t continue any longer.

I wasn’t sure if it was because Dettomolian had it under control or because of the priests’ barriers, but it didn’t seem to attack anyone.

However, that enormous, insidious cursed energy that seemed to live and breath could only astonish every one of us gathered in that place except for Dettomolian.

While everyone felt anxious, some time passed again, and the strange energy emanating from the cursed sword went back into it.

“That… What was that…?”

Ellen seemed to have some fundamental questions.

We knew that the sword was very dangerous, but neither Ellen nor I thought that it would be that dangerous.

Dettomolian eventually stopped the ritual in the middle, mostly because of everyone’s fear that something irreversible might happen if they were to proceed any further.

After the black energy disappeared, the wizards began to take action by sticking to the cursed sword.

Things seemed to have calmed down, so Ellen and I walked towards the center of the chapel.

“Are you the students that brought this thing here?”

“Yes.”

He quetioned me with a serious look on his face. The only students around there were Ellen, Dettomolian, and I, and we had said that we would come to observe the ritual.

“I won’t scold you. You have prevented this dangerous object from threatening the world. You did a good job.”

It didn’t look like he wanted to scold us.

“However, it’s too hideous of an object. I have no idea what it is, but we can’t keep it in Temple any longer.”

That was what he said. It wasn’t just some moderately dangerous thing. However, we still didn’t know what it was. Therefore, their decision to discard it or seal it wouldn’t change. I couldn’t ask to give it one more try.

“No… I know what it is…”.

However, at that moment, Dettomolian staggered towards us, maybe because he stayed up all night.

* * *

I had no idea what he originally planned on doing, but the ceremony got cut in the middle. However, Dettomolian still found out the origins of that cursed object.

"Re-really? You were able to find out what that… hideous thing is?”

"Not exactly, but… Yes…”

The person in charge looked at Dettomolian as if to urge him to tell us quickly.

“It’s something… very old… Its origins are ancient… so ancient that one can’t see when it started existing…”

Although he couldn’t find out what it was, it was something more ancient than anything in this world… An object older than stones and rocks.

“It’s something that was created before… the world existed.”

Something older than the world… I couldn't understand what he meant, but the priest seemed greatly astonished.

"Th-then… Then… No way. Don't tell me…"

Ellen's expression became serious as if she just realized something. She muttered in a daze.

"A Divine Relic…?"

That object existed before the conception of this world because it was something belonging to the gods who made the world.

An object that was older than anything found in this world…

A god's Divine Relic.

Dettomolian found out that the cursed sword was actually a Divine Relic. Something that old had to be something like that.

"You two…"

The high priest looked at Ellen and me in astonishment.

"If that is true, what you found… Seems to be a Divine Relic of the demons. The Demon Gods also seemed to have brought their Divine Objects to this world…"

A Divine Relic of the Gods that spread impure energy which revived the dead…

If it really was like that, it had to be a Divine Relic of the demons, not the Five Gods.

The high priest didn't seem to have any other choice but to come to that conclusion.

"The Demon God who is known to have such power is… the God of Corruption. Kier… Is that thing a Divine Relic of Kier?"

Kier, the God of Corruption, corresponded to the God of Purity.

For the first time in human history, a Demon God's Divine Relic had been discovered.

The guy seemed to feel confused as if he didn't know where to feel joy or fear in this situation.

"…A Demon God's relic…? Kier?"

The same went for Ellen, who seemed lost in thoughts.

However, I was stunned because of something else.

There are no Demon Gods. The demons and humans actually believed in the same gods…

Then, going by that, there couldn't be any Divine Relics of Demon Gods either. The Church of the Demon Gods did exist, and those who believed in it could also use divine power, but there was no way a "Demon God" could send down their Divine Relic.

There was no such thing as Kier, the God of Corruption. Kier, the God of Corruption, was just another name for Towan, the God of Purity.

If Dettomolian was right, it was certain that the cursed sword was a Relic.

There were five Divine Relics representing the Gods.

However, only two of them were featured in the original novel. Alsbringer, the Sword of Als, the God of War, and Lament, the sword of Mensis, the God of the Moon.

As for the other three Gods' Relics, I had never set them up, as there was no need for them to appear in the story. After all, there was no reason to show all five of them.

However, now that the novel had become reality, even the Relics that wouldn't have appeared on the main stage of the story would exist somewhere and have their own history.

Ellen and I found something that was supposedly the Divine Relic of Kier in the Darklands.

There were no Demon Gods and no Demonic Relics, but that thing was still a Divine

Relic—it had the power opposing Towan's concept of purity.

Therefore, in the end, it could be concluded with quite a high probability that its true identity was the Divine Relic of the God of Purity, Towan.

It was only by some complicated circumstances or because of the Church of the Demon Gods that the power of the sword had been manifested in the complete opposite direction.

I had originally only set up Alsbringer and Lament.

However, when I entered this world and took some religion-related classes in the first semester, I learned about the other three Divine Relics.

I was certain that it was the Holy Sword Tiamata.

* * *

[Quest appeared - Holy Sword Tiamata]

[Description: You found out that the item you dragged back from the Darklands was actually the Holy Sword Tiamata, misunderstood as a Divine Relic of a Demon God?! What an incredible coincidence?! Like everything in your novel.]

[Reward: It has already been given.]

It had already been given…

What the hell did that mean?

Was the reward confirming that it really was the Holy Sword Tiamata?

That system message was more or less directly saying that the thing was the Holy Sword Tiamata. That proved that my inference was correct, and it seemed like that was the reward…

Did it mean to tell me that I should try taking it somehow now that it confirmed that it was that Holy Sword?

I knew that the cursed sword wasn't just some ordinary object. That thing that could spread evil energy into the vast area surrounding it and bring back the dead, basically creating a land filled with zombies, couldn't be something trivial.

So, even though I knew it was dangerous, I just couldn't give up on it easily.

However, naturally, I could have never predicted that its true identity would be on the level of a God's Divine Relic. The three Divine Relics I hadn't set up had their own place in this world, and Ellen and I happened to find one during that incident in the Darklands.

If it weren't for me, it would have been discarded or sealed off as some sort of ominous sword without even getting misunderstood as a Demon God's Divine Relic.

Of course, Temple would never allow anyone to own that sword and would try to hide or destroy it.

I wasn't sure if they were capable of destroying a Divine Relic, but it was clear that they wouldn't let anyone have it.

I found it, but it wasn't mine in the end.

In that situation, if I insisted on having that sword, they might mistake me for Demon worshiper.

You bastard, we thought it was suspicious that you were so obsessed with it before!

It was possible that Temple would come out like that.

Tiamat was the reward that had already been given to me.

Please take it.

It seemed to be like that.

* * *

"The Divine Relic of a Demon God…"

On our way back to the dorm, Ellen kept mumbling blankly. I was the only one who knew the truth.

The opposite of the God of Purity, Towna, the God of Corruption, Kier.

Very few, including myself, knew that the two Gods were actually one and the same.

But there was one question:

If there were no Demon Gods, why was the Holy Sword Tiamata wielding a power that diametrically opposed the attribute of its Deity?

The Demon Gods had similar or opposing domains to the original Gods. In the case of Towan, the God of Purity, its corresponding Demon God had the opposing domain.

However, it was originally the God of Purity. If I believed in Towan as the God of Corruption, would I be able to wield the power of corruption?

So did the worshipers of the Demon Gods' Church corrupt the Holy Sword Tiamata? Was that possible?

Anyway, with things as they were, people couldn't help but believe that the cursed sword was the Divine relic of Kier, the God of Corruption—it was actually spreading evil energy, after all.

If someone were to say that it was actually the Holy Sword Tiamat, rather than calling it blasphemy, people would worry whether you hit your head or something. That was how ridiculous that situation was.

If I left things as is, I would get my reward stolen from right under my eyes.

I had to find a way somehow…

First I had to make all possible preparations, but I couldn't let that Holy Sword that appeared from out of nowhere get taken from me.

Ellen and I went back to the Royal Class dorm in total silence.

CHAPTER 189

Temple demanded to Dettomolian, Ellen, and I to keep quiet about the demons' Divine Relic.

It was the first time in human history that a Demonic Relic had been discovered, and because of that reason, it wouldn't be good if that information got to the demon god worshippers or the general public.

Even if what we brought back turned out to be the Divine Relic of a demon god, Ellen and I were still told that we did a good job. We had brought it there before it could pose a bigger threat, and before it could cause more chaos in this world.

However, since the item we had found was a Relic, it couldn't be revealed openly, so it might have been a historic moment, but it would eventually just be buried beneath the shadows, as it was something no one should ever know.

I couldn't go back to the dormitory the prior day, but that didn't pose any problems.

On Friday, I had Magic Sensitivity Training II, Comprehensive Physical Education II, and Demon Ecology with Ellen, Liana, and Harriet.

The Demon Ecology class started with a brief overview of demons. In fact, most people had never encountered demons

The Demon World War had also ended, so it was all unnecessary knowledge unless you were someone who planned on going to dangerous places.

Ellen put her all into that class, but honestly, I couldn't concentrate at all.

What was more urgent to me than learning about the ecology of goblins and orcs was somehow getting my hands on the Holy Sword Tiamata before it got sealed.

After all of my Friday classes, Ellen, Harriet, Liana and I went back to the dorm together.

"That was interesting. I never thought goblins would build houses. I guessed they'd

live in caves or something."

Liana seemed to enjoy having acquired that useless knowledge.

"B-by the way… I was more shocked to hear that an orc village consists of more than a thousand of them if it's a large one…"

Harriet's face turned pale at the thought of an orc village containing a thousand of those rugged orcs she had encountered on the deserted island. Ellen looked into the distance as she reviewed the contents of the class without even uttering a single word.

No, she probably wasn't actually reviewing, but instead thinking about dinner.

"Shall we eat out for dinner today?"

Classes were over, so we had more than enough free time over the weekend. Harriet asked us if we wanted to go out to eat dinner. Ellen and Liana nodded to her suggestion.

"I have to go somewhere."

However, I had to check something, so I didn't plan on having dinner with them. Harriet looked at me with a mischievous expression on her face.

"Huuh? I didn't even ask you to begin with, you know?"

"Oh, okay. Imma go, then."

"Eh… Huh? Ah, okay."

Harriet seemed a little surprised when I just left without retorting like I usually did.

* * *

I was in the Royal Class dormitory's library. If one went through the middle way and not the left and right ways where the dorm rooms were located, one would find multiple auxiliary buildings like banquet halls, and one of them was a library.

I didn't know how many books it contained, but it seemed to be an incredibly huge

amount. Harriet and Adelia would often borrow many books from the place to study magic, but that was actually my first time going there.

Tall bookshelves and ladders to climb them filled the area.

It actually looked like the building was completely made of books. I couldn't believe that they built such a huge library for only about 120 students.

The more I witnessed just how privileged the Royal Class was, the more I thought that it was a bit too excessive.

I saw some students reading books, sitting inside reading rooms, however there were less than three around, and none of their faces seemed familiar.

"What book are you looking for?"

A man who appeared to be a librarian came towards me as soon as I came in.

"I'd like to read some books about the five Divine Relics."

"Ah, Yes. Understood. Please wait here."

Since the volume of books in the library was so vast, it seemed like students didn't look for the books they wanted to read themselves but rather let the librarian get the books for them.

The librarian went off somewhere and soon brought about five books with him, putting them down in front of me.

"I will put them back, so you can just leave them here. If you want to borrow them, make sure to fill out this card. The rental period is a week."

"Yes, thank you."

I didn't plan on renting any of them, so I took a seat at one of the reading room tables and opened one of the books—they weren't really thick.

[The History of the Five Divine Relics]

I opened the book.

[God of war, Als - Alsbringer]

[God of the sun, Salaam - Lapelt]

[Goddess of the moon, Mensis - Lament]

[God of courage, Ritter - Alixion]

[Goddess of purity, Towan - Tiamata]

The table of contents contained the names of the Five Divine Relics. I wasn't interested in the others, so I went straight to the page on Tiamata.

[Sword of Purity, Holy Sword Tiamata]

Towan, the goddess of purity, is a deity that rejects all unclean beings and sincerely desires for all of them to be purified and eradicated. Therefore, Tiamata, the Holy Sword imbued with the power of the goddess, is known to exert power incomparable to the other Divine Relics in its role of destroying unclean beings.

That is why in all periods Tiamata appeared, the land was ravaged by undead, vampires, and other unclean things opposed to anything pure. Each time, Tiamata has purified the world in the hands of a champion who executed Towan's will.

It can be said with certainty that there is no unclean being which could resist the Power of the Holy Sword Tiamata. As such, it is the strongest power in terms of exorcism among the other Divine Relics.

The first time the Holy Sword Tiamata appeared…

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Following that was a complete list and description of every person who had carried the sword Tiamata. It described what they had done with Tiamata and which evil beings they had repelled.

It wasn't something I needed to know, but I was able to find out what kinds of powers the Holy Sword Tiamata held.

It was the strongest weapon against the undead. I pondered if I really needed something like that, but the weapon's specs alone weren't bad. There was nothing wrong with having it.

As I carefully read through it, I came to the last entry.

Towan's last champion, Leigorn.

The numerous achievements he made after acquiring the Holy Sword Tiamata were listed under his name.

He wasn't a powerful hunter of the undead.

What he mainly hunted weren't the undead, but demon god cultist believers. He crushed numerous Demon worshipers that were spreading throughout and devouring the Empire.

Many such feats were listed in succession, and soon I reached the last record.

It was a record in the year 30 of the Imperial Calendar.

We were in the 332nd year of the Imperial Calendar, so it was about 300 years from our time.

Year 30 of the Imperial Calendar…

During an incident that occurred, an unknown group seized Tiamata. In the process,

Towan's champion, Leigorn, was killed.

It has been presumed that they took Tiamata and then fled to the Darklands. Towan's biggest Paladin Order has been sent to the Darklands to track them down, but none of them returned.

From that point on, priests and paladins of Towan were sent to search the Darklands to retrieve Tiamata, but none of them could bring back any results and only increased the number of people sacrificed to the Darklands' demons.

In the end, the Church of Towan failed to recover Tiamata to this day.

Nothing conclusive can be said about that unknown group that killed Leigorn or why they stole Tiamata.

However, the theory considered as most convincing is that the believers of the Church of the demon gods, the cult Leigorn was ordered to eradicate at the time, systematically killed him and hid Tiamata out of fear that another champion of Towan might appear.

300 years ago…

* * *

I believed that was the time when the power of the Church of the Demon Gods was faltering. Leigorn, the champion of Towan, the goddess of purity, did many things to exterminate the Church of the demon gods, another of his main enemies, not the undead.

However, he was eventually killed by the believers who later fled to the Darklands. There didn't seem to be any conclusive evidence, but going by the circumstances, it seemed to be almost certain.

The Holy Sword Tiamata had disappeared somewhere in the Darklands.

And more than 300 years later, an unknown cursed sword had been discovered in the Darklands.

The believers who served Kier, the god of corruption, must have hated the believers

of Towan and their deity, who was diametrically opposed to theirs. And it went without saying how much they hated her champion, Leigorn.

As such, that strange situation where those who actually believed in the same god hated each other the most came to be.

Anyway, Kier's believers killed Leigorn, then stole the Holy Sword Tiamata and fled to the Darklands.

They probably tried to corrupt the Holy Sword, fitting for those who worshipped the god of corruption. The result of their actions was that cursed sword.

I didn't know why that sword ended up in some grave somewhere in the Darklands. Though I could come up with some reasons, like the paladins of Towan had actually found the believers of the Church of the demon gods who stole Tiamata and somehow succeeded in annihilating them all after fighting them.

And without recognizing Tiamata in its corrupted form, they had labeled it an evil relic and sealed it in the graves of the dead believers along with their burial goods.

Or there was also a big possibility that the believers couldn't handle the corrupted sword themselves and had decided to seal it. That sword was able to control one's mind, after all.

So either Towan's paladins or the demon gods' believers themselves sealed it.

Of course, I didn't really care what really happened in the past.

"…"

The important thing was the strange situation of the Holy Sword Tiamata demonstrating the powers of Kier, an opposing god.

Maybe there wasn't any set attribute for 'Divine Power'.

If one followed the doctrine of Purity and believed in Towan, one's divine power

would be pure.

If one followed the doctrine of Corruption and believed in Kier, one would be able to use the divine power of corruption, even though they also believed in the same being.

It was true that they actually believed in the same being.

However, in the end, depending on the orientation of their faith, two totally different types of power could be realized.

It wasn't like there were no demon gods.

Those entities didn't have any kind of attribute to begin with, so were they only lending strength according to their beliefs?

There was neither Towan nor Kier—those gods were merely divine power dispensers.

If one believed in the goddess of purity, they would give you the power of purity, and if one believed in the god of corruption, they would lend you the power of corruption.

Put differently, deities could either be demon gods or human gods.

What determined one's divine power wasn't some god, but the direction of one's faith. The fact that the power of a demon god already existed itself had already been proven by Tiamata's corruption, after all.

In conclusion, Tiamata was corrupted. They had corrupted the relic of their most hated goddess, but in the end, they both still believed in the same deity. The power of the deity was used to change the same deity's relic's orientation itself.

Like that, the Holy Sword Tiamata became a cursed sword.

After corrupting Tiamata, did the demon gods' believers realize that Kier and Towan were the same entity?

Just as the orthodox believers wouldn't be able to accept that, the believers of the Church of the Demon Gods wouldn't have been able to acknowledge something like

that either.

If corrupting it was possible, then it should also be possible to reverse it.

The demon gods believers corrupted Tiamata.

Then if a priest who believed in Towan purified the cursed sword, it should return to being Tiamata.

However, up until then, Temple had taken various measures. Wizards might have tried to recognize and interpret the curse placed on the sword or even tried to release it.

Then why didn't it return to its original state?

The way the priest had done it up to then might be wrong.

The demon gods' believers deliberately tried to corrupt the Holy Sword Tiamata…

However, the priests of Towan only tried to identify and purify or remove a curse.

That was the wrong way. First of all, that sword wasn't a cursed sword, but it had its orientation twisted. There was never a curse to begin with.

They had to "Restore" it, but all they did was continuously push the "Delete" button. If only they knew that the sword was actually a Holy Sword, then the priest would be able to restore Tiamata.

However, before that…

Would the priest of the Church of Towan even accept that the Holy Sword Tiamata had been corrupted?

Would they be able to accept that it wasn't the power of the demon god Kier that resided in the sword, but that it was the corrupted power of Towan?

They had to accept the fact that it was possible to corrupt Divine Relics. They also had to accept that the Relic of Towan, the goddess of innocence and purity, had been corrupted to the point where it held the opposite power.

The priest would never acknowledge that the Relic was Tiamata.

Just saying that the cursed sword was Tiamata would likely lead to me being put on trial for heresy.

Knowing the truth that the cursed sword was Tiamata enabled me to get some clues.

However, the priest might not believe me, and even if they did, they might not accept the possibility that a Divine Relic could be turned into a Relic of a demon god.

Even if they knew how to do it, it just had too many prerequisites such as convincing the priests, and something close to a Religious Reformation had to happen to their thought process to proceed.

And what authority did I even have to say anything more about that Relic that had already been identified as a Relic of a demon god?

It was no longer the business of some student, so no matter how many things I had been able to find out, my words would fall on deaf ears.

The Imperial Family and the Five Great Churches would also pay a lot of attention to the discovery of the first Divine Relic of a demon god.

And then I would come in saying something like that?

'I know that it isn't a Relic of a demon god, but the Holy Sword Tiamata. (17-year-old)'

It would be weird if I were able to escape with my neck still attached to my body.

That incredible event would go down in history. Even if I was the one who discovered it, the adults wouldn't believe me at all.

What was even the point of finding a way to turn it back? Tiamata had been gone for a long time already.

Should I try something with the help of Charlotte and Bertus? However, it would also look quite bad if I were to obsess over something that was believed to be a demon god's thing as well.

For the moment, I was certain that it was impossible for me to exert any kind of influence over Tiamata unless some other force, not my own, helped me out.

Eventually, I left the library and trudged back to my private room.

"…?"

Then, right when I returned to the room, I saw something strange.

"…What?"

I was unable to comprehend the situation to the point where I could only just stand there, completely dumbfounded.

Why was that here?

A longsword without a cross guard and a slightly blackish blade.

"What's with this?"

The cursed sword was placed on my bed.

Why was something I absolutely shouldn't have in my room right at that moment?

I didn't know what happened, but the bottom line was this:

"…Aren't I screwed?"

Totally screwed.

It had just been taken away.

I had no idea why it happened, but the situation could be perfectly misunderstood as me having stolen an item that had been identified to be a demon god's Divine Relic.

CHAPTER 190

Nothing good would come from telling the teachers that the cursed sword had suddenly appeared before me.

Up until then, I had been thinking about how I should take Tiamata because people mistook it for something that was not Tiamata, but something that belonged to a demon god. Just for having it, they would probably kill all three generations of a family.

If I was caught having it, they would cut off my head—no questions asked.

Just why did it appear there so suddenly? That would create an even bigger commotion.

Although I couldn't see the situation in the temple right then, I figured it should be in quite the mess because the demon god's Relic suddenly had disappeared.

'Who is it?'

'Who the fuck is doing this to me?'

If they found me like that, I wouldn't even be able to make any excuses.

I would die not because they found out that I was the son of the Demon King, but because they would treat me as someone possessed by a demon god's divine Relic.

I immediately brought a training sword from the training room and put the cursed sword in the training sword's scabbard. It wasn't that unusual to walk around with a training sword hanging from one's waist, so there was no reason for anyone to be suspicious.

I tried my best to pretend to be calm and went out of the dormitory towards the temple in the middle of the night.

Then I threw it to some place where people couldn't see it too well and returned to the room.

Temple should be in quite the hurry to find it, so someone would surely find it. They also should have heard that they should be careful not to touch it, as it was a dangerous item.

And…

"…"

I soon found out that no one had actually brought that cursed sword into my room to fuck me over.

"What… the…?"

On my bed, lying in the same position as before, there was the cursed sword.

It wasn't a person who brought it there. No one could do that in such a situation—I threw that cursed sword away several times in a similar fashion.

But no matter how many times I did it, the sword would return to laying on my bed like before.

No one would be capable of putting it back every single time.

The sword had come back by itself…

—That was the only explanation I could think of.

Wasn't it that?

A cursed doll that kept coming back even if one threw it far away…

Was that thing the magical sword version of that?

I then understood what the reward message of the latest quest had meant.

—It said that the reward had already been given.

It wasn't that it confirmed the identity of the sword Tiamata…

I had already become the owner of the corrupted Tiamata which kept coming back

to me.

The purpose of that quest wasn't to purify and acquire Tiamata.

Tiamata, the Holy Sword that had been mistaken as a demon god's divine Relic…

—A cursed sword that kept coming back to me no matter how I tried to throw it away.

It seemed like that sword had already accepted me as its master. I felt like the previous day's ritual had influenced it somehow, as it had been quiet up to that point. Its weakened power might have awakened.

Was it because the ritual wasn't completed but had stopped halfway through?

Even if I threw it away, it would just come back to me wherever I was.

If I was found out to be the owner of that supposed demon god's divine Relic, there was no way I would survive.

I was obviously soul bound to that demonic Holy Sword. It was useless to tell anyone that I had nothing to do with it, that it just came to me on its own—no one would believe me.

If I told them that it was actually the Holy Sword Tiamata, no one would believe me either.

I was in a situation where, no matter what I did, I would always fall into some trap.

The goal of that quest was actually to somehow deal with that situation.

* * *

Then wasn't the time for me to go to the library to read books.

I presumed that I had already become the sword's owner the moment I grabbed it in the Darklands, but until then, it had never returned to me like that or anything.

However, the ritual had caused some changes in Tiamata, and the sword, which had been calm up to that point, kept on coming back to me, its owner.

For there to have been a day where I was kind of obsessed with that sword… Could it be that it had a will of its own? Was it thinking something like 'Let's see how long you can keep throwing me away'?

If it was Tiamata, I would be treated as Towan's champion, but I was the only one who knew the truth for the moment.

That mess happened right after they started to believe that it was a demon god's Relic.

Temple must be flipped on its head by then because said demon god's divine Relic had disappeared, and it was clear that they would soon approach Ellen and me, the ones to have discovered it.

I had no idea if they would harbor any suspicions against us. I just couldn't figure out what to do in that situation, but then I suddenly heard someone knocking on my door.

-Knock, knock

-Reinhardt, come with me.

I was Ellen's voice. Signs of unease could be heard from it.

For the moment, I hid the cursed sword under the clothes in a drawer of my closet, not under my bed. Ellen absolutely shouldn't see me in that situation. I'd just keep it a secret, nothing good would come from seeing that damn thing, after all.

-Rattle

"Wh-why?"

Ellen's expression was dead serious.

"Mr. Epinhauser told me to get you."

Knowing that Tiamata had disappeared, it seemed like Temple had started their investigation right away.

Cold sweat ran down my spine.

* * *

Mr. Epinhauser was waiting for us outside of the Royal Class dormitory. Although he normally looked quite cold, he seemed even more serious than usual.

“The demon god’s divine Relic has disappeared.”

“!”

“Th-that’s…”

Ellen widened her eyes when she heard that the demon god’s divine Relic had disappeared, while I couldn’t help but shiver slightly.

I didn’t know what to do, but I couldn’t tell them that it was in my room right then. Nothing good would come from telling them that a demon god’s divine Relic just kept coming back to me even if I threw it away.

Tiamata’s owner was called Towan’s champion.

The fact that the divine Relic of Kier, the god of corruption, kept coming back to me meant that the demon god’s Relic had chosen me as its owner.

In other words, people would think that I was Kier’s apostle or champion.

I’d be lucky if they just ended things by decapitating me. I was pretty sure I would go through a lot of suffering before they would at last allow me to die.

I had to keep it a secret. Ellen was out of it, and I was as well, though for different reasons.

“Do you know something about that?”

“No…”

"Yeah, me neither…”

“Hmm, I see. You wouldn’t know much, as it was B-8 who performed the ritual…”

After the ritual got interrupted in the middle, the divine Relic had suddenly

disappeared. That seemed to be the reason that he thought that Dettomolian would know something about it, but not us. And his homeroom teacher, Mr. Mustrang, would take care of questioning him.

"Aren't we in a very dangerous situation right now?"

Ellen asked Mr. Epinhauser with a nervous look in her eyes.

"Indeed, our current situation isn't a safe one, to say the least."

Even as a joke, he wouldn't be able to say that things were okay. A dangerous object presumed to be demon god's divine Relic had suddenly disappeared in the middle of Temple.

"Well, perhaps, can't you try… tracking the aura of that relic?"

At Ellen's worried question, the teacher just shook his head.

"That is not within my area of expertise, so I can't say for sure, but it quite literally just disappeared all of a sudden. It has been said that the aura of the divine Relic seemed to have completely disappeared… and that it would be better if it just disappeared like that. However, I don't think so."

That was some good news, at least.

The evil energy that flowed out from the cursed Tiamata had disappeared completely, so the wizards and priests had quite the hard time tracking the divine Relic. If they could do that, they would have stormed into my room right away, but they didn't.

They weren't trying to track it anymore.

"First of all, this wouldn't be good if the other students found out. Keep quiet about this matter. We will do something about this. Don't even try to find it on your own."

"Yes."

"…Yes. "

If rumors about a demon god's divine Relic appearing and suddenly disappearing

spread, there would be just as much confusion among the people as the terrorist attack on the Imperial Capital last time. For the time, it seemed like Mr. Epinhauser wasn't suspicious of Ellen or me.

After he went back, I started to ponder for a bit.

'Should I tell Ellen the truth? That the cursed sword chose me as its owner, and even if I keep throwing it away, it just keeps coming back to my room.'

"…"

Ellen was looking at me.

When I saw that look in her eyes, all my thoughts of speaking the truth completely disappeared.

See, I told you not to bring that ominous thing.

That was what her eyes seemed to tell me.

Certainly. Ellen had always been against bringing that sword back with us.

She wanted to leave it in the Darklands or with Relya, the suspicious wizard.

It was true that I ended up in this situation because I was greedy. She wouldn't even believe me if I told her that it was actually the Holy Sword Tiamata.

For some reason, it was in my room.

And it kept coming back no matter what I did.

If I told her the truth, I felt like I'd get beaten up! She'd tell me something like, "What did I tell you?!"

She wouldn't actually kill me, but… She would probably beat me half to death.

Sh-shit.

I was fucking scared…

I was more scared of getting hit by Ellen than getting dragged away by the inquisition…

Was that how a husband felt right before he got caught having bought a game console behind his wife's back?

No, not just a game console, wasn't it more like having bought some kind of supercar without your wife's knowledge? That wouldn't just end with some slaps on the wrist but with a huge beating and a divorce.

Of course, we weren't like that.

Quite honestly, I would probably get beat up more than simply scolded!

Faced with Ellen's fierce gaze, which seemed to want to devour me, my lips trembled.

"S-sorry…"

I muttered as such in a crawling voice with my head bowed.

"It's better that it's gone. If you were to go around to find it because you want to use it…"

"What then…?"

Ellen stared at me with her eyes gleaming almost red.

That look seemed like she would kill me.

"Do you want to know?"

"N-no! N-not at all!"

I-I'm sorry. It's in my closet!

I want to get rid of it, but it won't let me!

At that moment, I really wanted to cry.

* * *

Past the curfew…

I sat on my bed with all the lights in my room turned off.

In front of me, sitting on my bed, was the corrupted Tiamata, which kept returning to my room like a cursed doll.

I thought that I had become the master of that corrupted Tiamata. Even if I tried to throw it away, it didn't matter where, it wouldn't work.

I didn't know what made it return to my room and not my hands, though.

It seemed like I had already become its owner from the moment I grabbed it.

Honestly, as soon as I held the sword in my hands, all the zombies that were still 'alive' and moving around had immediately turned back into corpses.

That was the moment that I had become Tiamata's owner. Was it some kind of concept like only those who could overcome the curse laid upon the sword could become the master of the corrupted Tiamata?

However, during the examination they conducted on it in Temple, nothing like the sword returning to me ever happened.

It was more than clear that the ritual Dettomolian conducted had some effect on it. It might have led the sword to regain its power. That was why it kept coming back to me, as it seemed to consider me as its master.

Holding the corrupted Tiamata in my hand, I stared at it.

By the way…

'Do I really have to purify it?'

That was what suddenly came to my mind.

It didn't spread around evil energy anymore after I had become its owner—except during that ritual performed by Dettomolian that forcibly pulled out its power.

Unless I used it with malicious intent, the corrupted Tiamata didn't seem to evoke

any bad effects.

To put it bluntly, it didn't seem to be affected by the demonic curse placed on Tiamata, evoking the opposite effect of the Holy sword, and didn't seem to have any particularly bad effects on its surroundings. And since I was its complete master, it couldn't be used for any impure purposes without my consent.

If I really had to purify it and turn it back into Tiamata, I would need someone to do it for me because I couldn't do it.

If it got known that I had become the master of a demon god's divine Relic, I would lose my head, but if it got known that I had become the master of Towan's Holy Sword, I would receive unnecessary attention—the whole continent would have its eyes on me.

Ellen didn't hide her identity as Ragan Artorius' younger sister and owner of the Holy Sword Lament for no reason. Even if I wasn't the son of the Demon King, there was nothing good about leading such a troublesome life. I had a lot of secrets to hide, so I didn't want that at all.

I mean, that situation couldn't be all that bad for me, right?

I found out that the cursed sword was actually a divine Relic, and it had come into my grasp.

It wouldn't cause anyone any harm as long as I was its owner.

However, there was a huge uproar in Temple because the demon god's divine Relic had suddenly disappeared, so to calm that commotion, was it necessary for me to purify the corrupted Tiamata and announce that the cursed sword was actually Tiamata all along and that I was its master?

Why would I have to do that?

If I just did nothing, I would already be halfway at my goal, which was exactly what I planned on doing.

However, even if I used it as is, there still remained one important issue…

Although its orientation was slightly different, it was still the Holy Sword Tiamata.

And it should have been capable of soul unity, like Ellen's Lament and Alsbringer.

If so, then was that sword already soul bound to me?

Ellen could summon and recall Lament as many times as she wanted. It was usually stored in a sword case in her room, but she could call it and send it back whenever she needed it.

I raised my hand in the air.

Summon Tiamata.

"…"

Shit.

As expected, nothing happened.

The sword relic didn't even move an inch from the bed.

After that, I tried everything I could think of to call the sword, but the corrupted Tiamata didn't even budge a little bit.

I didn't know if it was soul-bound to me or something, but it sure didn't respond to my will.

There didn't seem to be any specific way to summon a soul-bound sword either.

Either way, that made it clear that it was only half bound to me.

In the end, the corrupted Tiamata was only a half-relic at the moment, and I was only half its owner.

Leaving it hidden in my room was just a temporary solution. Staff assigned to the Royal Class' dormitories would visit every room to clean them, after all. If I told them I would take care of the cleaning myself, they might not enter for a day or two. However, if I kept doing that, it would seem suspicious.

For the moment, I could hide it somewhere in the room where the staff wouldn't find it, but if they suddenly decided to clean all the rooms without my knowledge, that

would be useless.

Even if I left it as is, it wouldn't harm anyone unless I, as its owner, willed it.

However, in order to ensure that nothing happened, the soul bond between me and the sword had to be properly established so that I could summon and recall it freely.

It would be crazy to just leave the corrupted Tiamata in my room while I couldn't do that.

Something…

I had to do something about that.

CHAPTER 191

The disappearance of a demon god's divine Relic…

Although things were a complete mess for the teachers, the students had no idea about what was going on.

Anyway, I felt a little guilty about making them look for something they wouldn't be able to find…

What should I do?

If I told others that I had it, my head would go flying, so I couldn't do that.

Saturday…

I didn't go out to do my early morning exercise.

It would have been impossible for me to just calmly exercise while knowing that the nuclear bomb in the form of a sword might explode in my face. Adriana seemed to be waiting for me, but I just couldn't leave.

Even when I was just sitting still in my room, I couldn't sleep properly because of the pounding of my heart.

What if someone finds it?

If the Temple teachers find out about all this, would I be able to get out of Temple somehow?

With Sarkegaar's ring, is it possible to somehow get away from Temple?

I didn't really mean it.

However, it sure was a huge mess when my thoughts wandered to the worst cases that could happen.

A Royal Class student brought a strange item back to Temple that was thought to be cursed.

However, it was later found out that it was presumed to be a demon god's divine Relic.

Then it suddenly disappeared, but it turned out that the same Royal Class student who had brought it had it with him.

When investigating the student, it turned out that he was the descendant of the late Demon King, the Demon Prince that had survived.

—If all that got revealed, it was obvious that not even 100 million achievement points were enough to get me out of that!

Anyway, that situation seemed so contrived and much too coincidental.

The cursed sword I found in the Darklands somehow turned out to be a god's divine Relic, and it had been mistaken as the Relic of a demon god, then it suddenly appeared in my room.

That just didn't make any sense unless someone artificially created the situation to screw me over!

Damnit.

I felt like the world itself hated me.

Certainly…

Nothing would have happened if I just threw that thing away in the Darklands, saying that it felt too ominous or something.

Even if someone had created that situation, I couldn't say anything against it because the situation was the result of my decision, after all.

I had many opportunities to give up that cursed sword, but I tried to take it for myself somehow, and that was how that situation came to be.

Anyway…

I didn't go out for my early morning exercise and wasn't able to sleep properly, but I still tried to organize my thoughts on how to deal with the situation by lying on my bed.

The corrupted Tiamata…

Once it reached Temple, they had tried to interpret or lift the curse placed on it. However, they didn't seem to be aware of the detailed mechanisms behind divine power.

Wouldn't the results be a little different if they were to approach it not as a cursed item but just as a corrupted divine Relic that had to be restored to its original form? Those were my thoughts on the matter.

I wasn't a priest or a wizard, so I knew their methods were wrong, but I couldn't tell how they were wrong.

However, in fact, I couldn't leave it in the hands of Temple's priests anymore. Telling them that the cursed sword that had suddenly disappeared had returned to my grasp would be suicide.

I would be mistaken as an apostle of a demon god, and whether I wanted to or not, every religious force would try to catch and kill me.

If I said something like, "I'm really not a demon god's apostle, you know?" they'd just go, "Yeah, right." and cut my head off. Who the hell would believe someone who had something like that? I wouldn't believe myself, either.

The lost Relic of a demon god… Me having it…

A situation in which I couldn't get any help from Temple…

There were only three people I could ask for help in that situation.

One would be Ellen. She trusted me completely and would probably help me. Of course, I had to be prepared to get a beating. However, I didn't know if Ellen could actually help me at that point.

Next would be Dettomolian, who had performed the ritual.

I could ask him what the ritual he did before was actually supposed to do and then make him proceed with the rest of it to complete it.

I didn't know what the goal of the ritual was, but I was more than certain that it awakened the corrupted Tiamata's powers or ended up making some changes to it.

The result was that Tiamata, which had been kept somewhere else, suddenly returned to me.

If I completed the ritual, it might complete our soul bond, enabling me to control the sword. As the corrupted Tiamata didn't really have a negative effect on its surroundings on its own, I could just toss it somewhere hidden from others and leave it there and summon it when I needed it.

And the third person…

One of the biggest reasons why I didn't get brainwashed by that cursed sword.

Trait - Sacred Spirit.

Its original owner, Olivia Lanze.

Olivia Lanze was so powerful that she was even called Saint of the Eredian District, but she ended up abandoning her faith. Although she had already been disillusioned by her faith, she still held enormous divine powers.

I had saved her life. There was a pretty good chance that she would help me.

If she presumed that the sword was actually Tiamata, the Holy Sword, and not the divine Relic of a demon god, she might be able to perform a purification or restoration ritual on it.

And she might be able to take over the ownership of the sword from me as well.

Regardless of whether it was possible to transfer the ownership of that sword to others, I wouldn't know anyone to give it to, even if I could.

Anyone who touched the sword would get their mind taken over, after all.

The only ones who were definitely immune to that curse were Olivia Lanze and me, who had the trait "Sacred Spirit".

Just as I became the master of the sword after I grabbed it, Olivia wouldn't be affected by the sword's curse either if she held it.

If it was possible to transfer the ownership, the only one I could transfer it to would be Olivia Lanze.

Of course, I didn't know if she would help me out or not.

It was the weekend…

Eventually, I was forced to leave the room, so I locked the corrupted Tiamata in a drawer. Even if a staff member came in to clean, they wouldn't open that.

However, I kept feeling uneasy even while I was eating breakfast.

I felt like I had gone out after I watched some porn on my pc and had forgotten to close the tab.

No one would come into my room, but what if someone did? What if they saw?

My head was full of such thoughts.

The crucial difference between those two situations was that if I got caught, it wouldn't just end in my humiliation, but in the loss of my head.

Anyway, it felt the same! I felt fucking uneasy!

Fortunately, no one was able to sense my abnormal state of mind, which meant that my anxiety wasn't evident on my face.

* * *

After breakfast…

I first tried to visit Dettomolian in Class B's dorm.

However, he wasn't in his room.

"If you're looking for Detto, he hasn't returned after Mr. Mustrang called him yesterday."

When I asked Charlotte if she had seen Dettomolian after meeting her in Class B's dorm, she just shook her head slightly as she answered me.

"Oh… Is that so?"

"Hmm… You must feel worried as well."

Charlotte sighed slightly as if she was aware of the situation and patted me on the back. It was quite the huge deal that a demon god's divine Relic had been discovered, so it seemed like she thought I was going to try something.

"It's okay, Reinhardt. The teachers will take care of everything. Don't worry too much and rest. It's not your fault."

Urgh.

Charlotte's eyes that showed her unconditional trust in me hurt my heart.

The Imperial Family must have been thrown into a state of turmoil by the appearance of an item believed to be a demon god's divine Relic, and its disappearance would have caused an even bigger uproar.

I didn't know much about the internal affairs of the Imperial Family, but the atmosphere inside of it should have gotten quite serious.

Damnit.

The item I brought was so incredible that it had managed to turn the whole city upside down.

It was just like a rotten apple spoiling everything around it.

Of course, if it were known that it actually was the Holy Sword Tiamata, they'd be in a festive mood, but that was only if they were willing to accept that it was Tiamata.

‘This might cause this world’s version of the Yesong Controversy. ‘

Was it really Towan’s will that cursed Tiamata to hold her opposing power, the power of corruption? Was that really the corrupted Tiamata or not? If the divine Relic of the god of purity could be corrupted and restored again, would it still be a Relic representing the power of purity?

—They would fight over the verity of the matter like that.

It wasn’t just a nuclear bomb in the material sense, but in the ideological one as well. The fact that divine Relics weren't absolute items would cause an enormous uproar in the religious world.

Anyway, I was planning on asking Dettomolian what ritual he was trying to perform, but it seemed like he was still held up by the teachers.

I hoped that he wasn’t going through any hardships. After all, the most suspicious individual in this incident wasn’t me but Dettomolian. After he performed the ritual, Tiamata had disappeared.

That ritual certainly didn’t seem all that sacred to them as well. It was such a blasphemous sight.

However, Dettomolian didn’t perform the ritual because he wanted to, but because Temple ordered him to.

Since I couldn’t consult Dettomolian first, I immediately headed to the fifth-year dormitory and asked for Olivia Lanze.

“Reinhardt! Long time no see. It’s so nice to see you!”

“A-ah! What’s wrong with you?!”

As soon as Olivia Lanze saw me, she instantly became happy and came rushing towards me, hugging me recklessly.

“I’m sad! Didn’t you miss me? Hm? Didn’t you take much too much time to come visit me? Hmmmm?”

“H-hey! Let go!”

“Don’t waaaant tooo!”

I knew things would turn out like that!

* * *

Olivia Lanze.

She had been a believer of the god of purity, Towan, and everyone expected her to become the commander of the Knights Templar.

However, after learning of the Knights Templar’s corruption, she tried to renounce her faith, and originally, she should have already left the main stage of the story, ending up being broken or dead.

Some time back, Adirana and I had been able to save Oliva Lanze from Riviere Lanze, the former commander of the Knights Templar, by doing various things.

As such, Olivia Lance lost all trust in her faith. She was beyond disillusioned with the corrupt Knights Templar, she was deeply disappointed in the faith’s god itself.

Every time she saw me, she would tell me something like, “Don’t see anyone else, Reinhardt, because you’ll marry me later, after all.”

That was why I would be peppered with jealous girls by others, and I even got the title of “guy who only hangs out with girls” by them.

In fact, things weren’t that different from that, after all, so I couldn’t really say anything against it.

Anyway, if I was asked how close I was with Olivia Lanze, I'd say not that close.

That person just showed some one -ided affection towards me. The only problem was that the way she showed her affection was a little too aggressive.

"I felt sooo sad… I had nowhere to go, so I was stuck here all vacation, and you didn't even visit me once. I thought you'd come here to tell me about what happened in the Darklands…"

"Why would I tell you about that?"

"Aren't we supposed to know everything about each other?"

"What the hell are you saying?!"

And I couldn't stand myself for not even being able to push her away, even though I didn't like that at all!

When I was with that person, I felt like I was having a mental breakdown in real-time. Anyway, we talked about various things outside of the Royal Class' dormitory. I couldn't even look into her eyes as she clung to my arm and smiled.

"I heard a bit. You've solved some huge incident, got rewarded, and ranked up a lot as an adventurer."

"Where did you hear that from?"

"My, there are actually fewer people who don't know about you two, you know? You and the girl called Ellen went to the Darklands, although no one knows the details, there are rumors that you came back after solving a huge case, right?"

It had already been weird for two freshmen to go to the Darklands, and it was obvious that we came back after solving some huge incident there. It seemed like that story had already spread.

"So, I was kind of expecting you to tell me some things…"

Olivia Lanze pouted and showed her disappointment. 'No, if you were so curious, you could have come and asked me yourself.' Why was she waiting for me to come visit her?

“Senior.”

“Hm, what?”

She pretended to be upset, but she obviously wasn’t. She was doing that on purpose.

“I asked you to meet up with me because I wanted to consult you on a certain matter.”

“A certain matter…?”

“Yes. Before that, I want to ask you something…”

I looked directly at Olivia Lanze as I posed my question.

“What I’m about to say… can you keep it a secret, no matter what might happen?”

“Of course~?”

Olivia Lanze, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world, tilted her head and smiled bashfully.

“I’m not joking around.”

However, after she returned safely after being held captive, I could trust her no matter what she said because her attitude to most things seemed as light as a feather.

I had no idea if she was joking around or sincere in her words. She always had that mischievous and flirtatious look in her eyes, no matter what she said.

Olivia Lanze’s expression tensed up as I was saying that I wasn’t joking.

“You need help.”

The smile completely disappeared from Olivia Lanze’s face, realizing that I was really serious.

She gently let go of the arm she was clinging to and looked at me with a firm expression on her face.

“…Yes. I need your help.”

“I don’t know if you’ll believe me or not, but…”

Olivia smiled slightly, unlike the wide grin she wore up until then.

"I’m on your side."

It somewhat resembled the slightly sad smile she had on her face when she was called The Saint of the Eredian District.

“Trust me.”

It felt like she was telling me that she would be ready for anything I would tell her.

“Because I trust you as well.”

Olivia spoke those words so very calmly.

CHAPTER 192

They say a human's nature never changes.

Olivia Lanze was quite the quirky senior who liked to tease me, but in the end, her base nature hadn't changed.

She still seemed to feel a certain obligation to help others, and it looked like she thought that would be a given to help the one that saved her like that.

When I seriously asked for her help, I immediately knew from the look in her eyes that she would do whatever she could.

Someone who was usually light-hearted, but would always try to help out if needed.

—That was who Olivia Lanze was.

Most students might not be aware of it, but Temple was thrown into chaos at the moment, so I wanted to discuss that rather delicate story outside of Temple. However, it wouldn't be possible for me to take the corrupted Tiamata outside of Temple. Even if I try to disguise it as a training sword, I would obviously get caught at the exit.

Because a possible demon god's divine Relic in the shape of a sword had disappeared, it would just look suspicious if I went around wearing a sword at my waist for no good reason.

So I gave her a brief explanation in the park in front of the dormitory.

I talked about what happened in the Darklands, the cursed sword, what occurred after I brought it to Temple, and what we found out through the ritual Dettomolian performed.

The cursed sword was presumed to be a demon god's divine Relic.

—And my predicament where it suddenly kept coming back to me no matter what I did.

At that rate, I might get suspected of being a demon god's apostle.

If Olivia Lanze went to a teacher or the church accusing me of something like that, I would be dead.

However, I believed that she wouldn't do something like that.

Olivia furrowed her brows after hearing the whole story.

"This is all really hard to believe…"

Quite some time passed. It was a very long story, after all. Olivia was silent for a bit as if she was trying to retell my story in her head.

"Yeah… you couldn't have just told these things to just anyone. If the church finds out, they would kill you, no matter if you had the sword on you or not. They wouldn't even grant you a heresy trial."

She served Towan, so she would know best what the priests and heresy inquisitors of Towan were like.

I, who was chosen as the owner of the god of corruption, Kier's, divine Relic, the god diametrically opposed to Towan, would face extreme prejudice.

"They are going to think that you were chosen by the divine Relic because you were a corrupted being to begin with."

No matter what the truth was, if a person was chosen by such an unholy power, then they would have had to be evil to start with. Olivia Lanze knew that they would kill me with that kind of logic as a basis because she once served Towan.

"However… I don't know how I should help you with this…"

Although she was shocked to hear that it was a demon god's divine Relic, Olivia didn't seem to know how to help me, who was chosen by that thing, no matter how much she thought about it.

However, I already planned out what I was going to say.

“Senior, although this is just my guess, I don’t think this is actually a Relic of a demon god to begin with.”

“…What?”

Olivia Lanze was taken aback when I told her that it wasn’t actually a demon god’s divine Relic after stating that it was one without a doubt.

“Then… you think… it isn’t a divine Relic but just some ominous object?”

I shook my head.

“I don’t think there are such things as divine Relics of demon gods in the first place.”

These words seemed even more confusing to her.

“…divine Relics of demon gods don’t exist?”

“At least, that’s what I think.”

There were no such things as divine Relics of demon gods.

"Then what do you think it is?”

“My guess is that it’s Towan’s Holy Sword, Tiamata. I think it’s like this as the result of getting corrupted.”

“…That’s ridiculous.”

Olivia, of course, completely denied my ridiculous reasoning. It might have been any other divine Relic, but its characteristics were the exact opposite of the Holy Sword Tiamata.

“I don’t have any hard evidence. However, after hearing that assumption that it’s a divine Relic of a demon god, I looked into the divine Relics of the five great gods. From what I could tell, the relics of the five great gods have appeared continuously over thousands of years. There were people who used them, and their history is clearly written down.”

“…Yes. I know that better than anyone.”

Olivia Lanze knew more about the five gods than I, who only did some brief research the day before, so she should have known a lot more about the divine Relics of the great gods and what they achieved in this world.

Not all divine Relics of the five great gods had appeared in history all the time.

However, recounts of people doing great things with them had continued to appear.

"However, in all of human history, there had never been any recounts of a demon god’s Relic overturning humanity.”

“That’s true…”

Nothing was known about the divine Relics of the demon gods, not even their existence was confirmed.

Dettomolian’s testimony…

An unknown but incredibly strong power of the cursed sword…

Its power that could bring the dead back to life…

The fact that it had been discovered in the Darklands…

Based on that, one might be able to speculate that it might be the divine Relic of a demon god. They only assumed that it was a Relic belonging to Kier, the god of Corruption, to begin with. Temple didn’t immediately guarantee its veracity, either.

Olivia was convinced that the cursed sword I had was a divine Relic.

However, I refuted that there was no way that it could be something like a demon god’s divine Relic which had never appeared in history before.

“It has been said that the last time Tiamata had appeared was 300 years ago, and believers of the Church of the demon gods who killed the last champion of Towan stole Tiamata and fled to the Darklands.”

Olivia nodded at my words.

"That's right. After Towan's last champion, Reigorn, was murdered by the church of the demon gods, their believers… stole Towan's Holy Sword… and took it to the Darklands…"

Olivia went over the story she knew of, but gradually slowed down when she realized that I had found that sword in the Darklands as well.

"No way, could it be that the cultists cursed Tiamata to be the way it is now?"

"Something like that."

"That's far too speculative. I can't believe that a Holy Sword could become something like that. I just can't."

Well, it was very hard to convince Olivia. No matter how much she abandoned her faith, she couldn't turn away from Towan completely. It was just too much a guess that it was possible to corrupt a Relic of Purity to hold the exact opposite power.

It would just be conjecture if I couldn't convince her that the demon god Kier and the god Towan were the same entity. And I couldn't explain to her why it was like that.

For me to know the fact that there weren't any demon gods would mean that I knew about the actual belief system of the demons, and that would be really strange for me to know.

It would actually make no sense for me to know such things, so I couldn't tell her the truth of the church of the demon gods.

Tiamata, the Holy Sword that had the power to smite the undead, could become a demonic sword that ruled over the undead. To be honest, that wouldn't make sense to anyone. Even Eleris, who knew about the demons' belief system, wouldn't believe me if I told her.

Olivia claimed that the Holy Sword had disappeared somewhere in the Darklands and that cursed Relic was also found there, so she simply couldn't trust my claim that it was Towan's Holy Sword.

"Couldn't it be that no demon god's Relics had been found because the Darklands haven't been fully explored yet? They might have only appeared among the demon tribes who served the demon gods."

Olivia's guess was reasonable.

Just as there were Relics of the five great gods in the human realm, wouldn't there be Relics of the five demon gods in the Darklands and the humans just don't know about them? And by chance, I had found one.

There was one point I could refute here.

"…The Demon World War. If they had items like that, the demons would have used them in the war. However, the Demon King ended up killed and all his treasures were taken away, but among them, I don't think they found anything like a demon god's divine Relic. If they had, there would have been rumors spreading about it everywhere."

"…That's true. You're right. I volunteered to participate in the Demon World War, although I didn't actually fight in it. I never heard about anything like a demon god's Relic being sighted."

* * *

If there were such thing as demon god's divine Relics, there was no way the demons wouldn't have used them in the final war against the humans. Olivia actually participated in the Demon World War with the purpose to treat and support wounded soldiers.

She knew better than anyone what information they had back then. She hadn't heard about demons using powerful items such as divine Relics of the demon gods or something.

They had plundered the Demon King's Castle of all its treasures and magical items, but there hasn't been a word about them finding Relics of demon gods there.

Olivia would know better about those things than I.

If they had such powerful items like the demon gods' divine Relics in the Darklands, why weren't they used in the Demon World War?

So Olivia seemed increasingly unsure about my words that there weren't any demon gods' divine Relics to begin with.

It was an inference that started out with its conclusion.

—There were no such things as demon gods' divine Relics.

If that was the case, the cursed sword could absolutely not be a demon god's Relic. If so, there was only one conclusion one could get to: It was a divine Relic of one of the great gods.

But why had a divine Relic of a great god turned into something like that?

Tiamata disappeared along with the demon god worshippers who took it to the Darklands. Along the way, the worshippers did something to the divine Relic.

—That had been my guess so far.

"First, here's what I think. There are no such things as divine Relics of demon gods that could just suddenly appear out of nowhere. However, it's impossible for an item to be so old and hold such power if it wasn't a divine Relic. So that's why I think that this divine Relic of one of the five gods had been corrupted to become like that."

If what I said was true, I might end up being mistaken as the owner of a demon god's divine Relic that didn't even exist—it actually was Tiamata that got slightly corrupted.

"Yeah, I know what you're talking about. Before, I would have never believed a thing you said…"

If I had told her that when she was still a faithful believer in Towan, she would have treated it as a gigantic act of blasphemy against her goddess.

"If what you said is true, I would be just a little bit more disappointed in the gods."

However, she no longer served Towan, so she didn't get angry at my words, no matter if it was possible to corrupt the divine Relic of Towan or not.

None of the other priests of Towan would believe me, so they wouldn't have any reason to try restoring it, either.

One had to firmly believe that the cursed sword was Tiamata and that one had to restore its original form.

“I’ll take a look at it. I don’t know if I can purify it, but I can try, at least.”

However, Olivia was willing to try without much resistance.

* * *

The demon god’s divine Relic had disappeared.

It had left Reinhardt’s and her hands, so she thought that it was a matter for the teachers to take care of.

However, she also felt a little anxious.

In such situations, Reinhardt would usually try to do something. Maybe he was doing something reckless on his own, causing even bigger trouble.

Ellen was worried, so that was why she tried holding him in the training room to prevent him from doing anything useless.

However, Reinhardt went off somewhere in a hurry after breakfast.

He surely was off doing something reckless again. Thinking that she would drag him away if she found him, Ellen waited in the lobby for Reinhardt, who had gone off to who-knows-where.

-And you really just want to look around my room?

-Why, of course. What? Do you think I’ll eat you up?

-Please… Don’t say things like that.

The scene that was approaching her completely destroyed Ellen’s anxiety.

Olivia Lanze, a fifth-year Ellen also encountered in passing from time to time, was just entering the first-year Class A dorm while clinging to Reinhardt’s arm.

She was practically sticking to his arm.

They didn’t see each other often, but as soon as she was together with Reinhardt, she would act overly intimate with him—that was what she knew.

-Is there a specific reason why you try to get into my room like that?

-I wonder. Hehe. Why?

-If you try anything weird, I'll scream.

-Ooh~ What were you thinking? So you're also a man, huh~?

Reinhardt wore a disgusted expression while the female senior hanging from his arm was smiling brightly.

"…"

She was worried for nothing. That female senior wanted to enter Reinhardt's room, and he seemed to have reluctantly agreed.

Reinhardt made eye contact with Ellen but just passed by her pretending not to know her.

-Don't you have any snacks or tea?

-No. What are you even expecting of me?

Ellen felt a bit anxious as she watched Reinhardt's back as he got dragged away.

She was worried that he would cause trouble, but he wasn't up to anything. He was just normally spending his weekend.

Anyway…

"…"

There seemed to be an unknown emotion wiggling in her heart.

It was a strange feeling she had never felt in her life.

-Get off of me!

-Why? You like it too though.

-I'm not! I don't like this?!

-So now you're talking informally to me, huh? Do you want to get in trouble?

-Ah… This is annoying…

It felt like something was crushing her heart or tightening around it.

It was like a bug was crawling around on her heart and in her head.

It was really… unpleasant.

What a strange feeling it was.

CHAPTER 193

I let out a sigh when I walked into my room.

“I told you that we should pretend that everything’s normal, but that didn’t mean I wanted you to stick to me like a bitch in heat.”

“Bi-bitch in heat? Y-you… There really isn’t anything you can’t throw at your seniors head, huh?”

If we entered the room with serious expressions on for no reason, we would draw suspicion, so I had told Olivia to just act casually as if she was just going to hang out in her junior’s room, but she was acting way too casual.

I meant for her to just act casually, not to let out those kinds of comments. Anyway, we couldn’t just go to my room with firm expressions on our faces. Others would think what we were about to do was something serious otherwise.

Let’s just pretend that we’re doing pervy things! It would be better to be seen as a pervert than a demon god’s apostle!

I closed the door and drew the curtains.

“…”

I brought my female senior into my room, locked the door, and drew the curtains.

Anyone who saw that would think something like, “How impure!” Olivia Lanze also wasn’t able to meet my gaze and slightly patted her cheeks.

“Ha, haha… I-I’m feeling a little… nervous…”

That girl…

At that moment, she genuinely felt nervous.

It became totally clear to me that her usual mannerisms and flirting were purely just jokes.

When the atmosphere between us had become a little weird as if it was the real deal, she got cold feet.

Yeah, that girl, no matter how old she was, she still was someone who had never dated a man, let alone had any experience with them, as she had been busy serving Towan.

Seeing her clenching her fists like that, her hands seemed to sweat profusely.

"He-hey. You know. I'm actually pretty good at fighting… Erm, how should I put it? I'm not like that, okay?… So, uhm, be prepared."

"What the hell are you talking about?!"

"A-anyway! Th-th-that's right…"

It felt like she thought that I was trying to do something weird to her and—because she felt so scared—she told me something like, "If you dare do anything weird to me, be prepared to get hurt!"

I just pretended that I would do something, but I didn't even do anything yet, just how scared did she actually get? Did she just treat me as a little kid, and not a man, after all? However, when things ended up like that, she started imagining things and got scared, was that it?

Did she realize just then that I was a man as well?

Just what was with her? Was that cold sweat I saw on her forehead?

I carefully opened the locked drawer and took out its contents because I thought the atmosphere between us would only become even worse if things kept going like that.

"This is…"

“Yes.”

Superficially, it just looked like a sword with no special features, making one wonder if it was just some old sword.

Although it had been mistaken as the Holy Sword of a demon god, I assumed it to be the Holy Sword Tiamata, a corrupted Relic. Olivia was looking at me holding the sword with a grim expression on her face.

“You said that the sword can control the minds of people…”

“It didn’t do anything to me in my case because it seems like I’m inherently resistant to these kinds of curses…”

“Hmm… Will I be alright, then? I’ve always been quite resistant to mental attacks—I’ve learned that from my magic resistance measurements.”

Fortunately, Olivia Lanze knew of her high mental magic and mental attack resistance, so Reviere Lanze must have known that, even if he tried to brainwash her, he wouldn’t have been able to control her like that.

That was why he tried to break Olivia Lanze’s will after all that torture. However, in the end, her will was just as strong as her mental magic resistance, so without doing anything, she turned out to be a nuisance to him.

“Could I try holding it?”

“…Just be careful.”

“Yes, I’ll be fine.”

Although I knew that she would be safe, I still ended up saying that.

I pointed to the sword's hilt towards her, holding the blade in my hand. I knew I’d be fine, but Olivia Lanze wasn’t actually sure that she would be.

Still, she didn’t seem to hesitate.

The nervous-looking Olivia Lanze cautiously grabbed the corrupted Tiamata’s hilt.

I wasn't sure if the ownership over the sword would be transferred like that or not. However, Tiamata didn't seem to react when OIivia Lanze grabbed it, just like when I first held it.

"Hmm… I definitely… get what you mean. I feel something very powerful, a kind of manipulation attempt."

I hadn't felt anything, but it seemed like Olivia Lanze sensed that the corrupted Tiamata was trying to do something but failed.

"This might be the Holy Sword Tiamata…?"

"Yes."

"Except for you, I'm the first person to touch this sword, right?"

"Probably."

It was a cursed item, so it had to have been handled quite carefully. After all, I had firmly warned them that the sword could control the minds of others.

With the exception of me, Olivia Lanze was the first person to hold the sword safely.

"It's strange."

Olivia Lanze had a blank look in her eyes as she was looking down at the corrupted Tiamata.

"This kind of power is completely different. I have ever felt something so evil and ominous before…"

Then she smiled sadly as she held the sword.

"And yet, it's such a very, very familiar force."

The power shared the same source, after all.

Olivia Lanze seemed capable of feeling it slightly. I had no idea what divine power actually was, but Olivia Lanze had lived her whole life honing it.

She could feel the sword's power itself more clearly than the other priests because she was touching it directly.

Therefore, Olivia Lanze, who could use divine power on par with a high-ranking priest, immediately realized it just by holding the sword.

"Towan's powers were more geared towards determination rather than purity."

"Determination?"

"Yes."

Olivia was silently looking down at the sword.

"Rejection and annihilation of all unclean things. Disgust and hatred for all beings who go against providence. They have no tolerance for the existence of such things—that's why it's closer to determination than purity."

Just the mere existence of such things wasn't allowed. It was a level of determination that made one shiver… Such was the doctrine of Towan.

"Tiamata is supposed to be a symbol of that will."

—The will to not forgive those who go against providence, but annihilate them. Determination close to Loathing—that was Towan's doctrine.

"But… This sword is the exact opposite."

"…What do you mean by, 'the exact opposite'?"

"It holds utter loathing for all living things and providence, and possesses the will to overturn this world's providence… That's what I mean…"

Olivia Lanze was feeling the sword.

"It's a different kind of… determination."

Tiamata as the Guardian of the Providence… It was a symbol of determination against those who had gone against providence.

The corrupted Tiamata… It was a symbol of Loathing against providence itself and it was obsession as well as determination to completely deny it.

"…They hold very different powers, but ultimately, they hold the same 'will'."

"…You mean it holds determination for opposing values?"

"Yes."

Olivia Lanze seemed to have realized something.

"Although it holds powers so far removed from Towan, it's fundamentally just too similar."

It was just too similar to the determination that symbolized Towan's powers. Therefore, Olivia, familiar with its power, couldn't help but feel the corrupted Tiamata's similarities as well as vast differences to Towan.

"Of course, there is still a possibility that this is a Relic of Kier, the god of corruption. However, if it really was Kier's Relic… then their powers are weirdly similar to Towan's. The way the power is expressed is the total opposite, but the source of that power is extremely similar. This simply cannot be a power that hails from another being."

—That was the conclusion OIivia reached.

"This is Tiamata. But… The Relic of Towan… The fact that it's emitting the exact same type of power as is attributed to the demon god Kier…"

The expressed power was of the opposing type.

However, its source was insanely similar.

A corrupted Relic. Olivia, however, felt that the underlying origin behind the power itself didn't change.

There was common ground between these two opposing gods:

Determination.

“Kier and Towan are actually… the same… aren’t they?”

Olivia got stunned as she realized the shocking truth herself.

* * *

Although Olivia Lanze had abandoned her faith, she was stunned after speculating that Towan might be the same entity as Kier, the god of corruption, who she was taught to utterly hate.

She had questioned and abandoned her faith, but she never thought that the truth would be so absurd.

Olivia felt an unfamiliar power of a demon god from the corrupted Relic, but eventually, she found that demon god’s power was just too familiar.

—It was very similar to Towan’s power.

So she instinctively knew that Towan and Kier were the same entity. It was something none of the priests could figure out.

However, it was only natural that the priests didn’t realize anything.

After all, it was practically impossible for one to look at that cursed sword and think that it might be Tiamata, so they would never start to doubt the entity they believed in.

Olivia was able to look at the situation objectively because all her preconceived notions caused by her religion had been removed.

And in the end, she came to the conclusion that Towan and Kier were the same entity.

What followed was a certain chain of thought.

She probably reached the point that she questioned whether all she knew about the demon gods’ faith was just an illusion. It wasn’t unusual for her to be so shocked, so I waited until Olivia came back to her senses.

“Huu… Okay. I think I just found something out that I shouldn’t have.”

The truth about the Knights Templar was only a slightly bitter pill compared to what she realized just then. If it came out that a demon god was the same entity as the goddess, the foundation of their whole faith itself would completely collapse.

Of course, before that could happen, one's words wouldn't even earn a bit of credibility, though.

"So, can you turn it back into Tiamata?"

If Kier's priests could corrupt Tiamata, the opposite should also be possible.

"Uhm… I could try once. Though I'm not sure what the results will be. My strength might not suffice for something like that."

No one but OIivia could help with something like that, so she would try purifying Tiamata with her own power.

"Hmm… It's going to take some time, though. Can't we get it outside somehow?"

"Well… Probably not."

It would be better if we held the purification ritual in a more secret place. It was also pretty dangerous to recklessly take the sword out of the room. The day before, I had disguised it as a training sword and tried to throw it away, but that was before it was known that the demon god's Divine Relic had disappeared.

If we were willing to take that risk, we could take it out, but we wouldn't be able to take it out of Temple. Olivia touched her cheeks, seeming troubled.

"Then… I think we should hold the ritual in this room…"

It was a very time-consuming task, as was shown by Dettomolian last time.

"Wh-what do we do… Reinhardt? I-I think I'll have to stay over in your room today…"

"Ah…"

Olivia Lanze was very nervous because she would be staying in a boy's room for a day.

If she was going to be like that, then why act like that to begin with?

What was the point of acting all flirty, but then getting scared when she actually got into a situation like that?

* * *

It would have been nice if we could hold the ritual in a safer place, but we didn't have a choice.

In the end, we had to hold the ceremony in my room.

Although we could proceed with it there, someone might come in.

So, ultimately, we could only hold the ritual in a certain place in my room.

"…Is this really okay?"

"…That's the only place we can use. Absolutely."

Olivia decided to hold the ceremony in my shower room. If we closed the door, no one would know who was inside of it. Of course, the shower room wasn't that big, but it wasn't too small, either.

A purification ceremony for a Divine Relic was held in the shower room attached to a dorm room…

What the hell was that situation?

"I don't know how long it'll take, so I'll just start right away."

"Approximately how long do you think it will take?"

"Hmm… I've never done something like that before, so I don't really know. It might take the whole day. It might take more than that."

Fortunately, it was Saturday, so we had plenty of time.

"Wouldn't it be better if you ate something first?"

“That’s alright. This is nothing.”

Olivia smiled as if she was trying to say that she wouldn’t suffer any physical problems.

Laying down the corrupted Tiamata on the floor of the shower room, Olivia Lanze knelt before it.

What?

She was going to sit in that position? All day?

Flabbergasted, I got some cushions and handed them to Olivia.

“Jeez, you’re going to hurt your knees like that.”

“Huh? Ah… Yes. Okay. Thank you.”

Olivia laid out a cushion and knelt down on it.

“What’s there to be thankful for? I’m the one who’s grateful.”

After all, she went through all that trouble for me, not for herself. More than that, I was insanely thankful that she was actually trying everything she could for me as if it was the most natural thing, even if I didn’t tell her much.

She seemed to think that, as long as she could help someone, she should, of course, do it.

She had probably lived her whole life with that mindset.

She was completely different from me, so I just silently watched her start praying.

I quietly watched as the power of the god of Purity wrapped her whole body, and the goddess answered the false prayer of the one who had already abandoned her.

Towan still lent her power.

I wondered whether Olivia Lanze would feel grateful or thankful for the power lent through insincere prayers.

I watched her praying from outside the shower room in silence.

* * *

I was told that it would take a long time, so I had nothing really to do other than watch.

The divine power flowing out of Olivia's body enveloped the cursed sword. It seemed like something was happening, but the process was incredibly slow.

Olivia, who was performing the ritual, might know more, but as I could see her concentrating, I couldn't just interrupt her.

If things kept going like that, she would end up not eating anything. Would she be fine?

I didn't even have to be there. Whether I was there or not, the ritual would continue, so there was no reason for me to keep watching.

However, I didn't eat lunch either.

I couldn't calmly eat and rest when there was someone telling me they would go through so much hardship for me. Of course, Olivia Lanze wouldn't mind no matter what I did, but I wouldn't feel comfortable with that.

I decided to stand guard in case someone came in, but honestly, there was pretty much no way that anyone would come.

If anyone were to come, it would be Ellen, but she was the type that would just do her own thing. She might be thinking that I was up to something if I didn't show up at the gym, but she wasn't the type to ask why I didn't go.

Time passed, and no one came over to visit me.

* * *

There were some rules to training with Reinhardt. They weren't rules to be exact, it was just something they naturally did.

If they came there together, they would train together, if not, they didn't. Ellen went

to the gym almost every day, but Reinhardt sometimes had other things to do and wouldn't go to practice.

In cases like that, Ellen would just train alone, but she would never go look for Reinhardt.

Of course, if they ran into each other, she would gesture to him to come train with her, but she didn't force it.

It had always been like that.

So, if Reinhardt didn't show up, Ellen would just train without him.

But on that day, that didn't work.

Why isn't he coming?

Such thoughts were continuously running through her mind.

-Pak! Papak! Pak!

Cliffman was the only one in the training room except for herself.

Is he still with her? That senior?

She should have already left. Having found out from the lobby that the fifth-year Olivia Lanze would go to Reinhardt's room, she just went to train in the gym.

A long time had passed already, so of course, she should have gone back. Reinhardt didn't seem to enjoy having her look around his room.

Of course, she already went back. It's past lunchtime after all.

However, Reinhardt didn't come to eat lunch.

Are they still together?

Just what the hell are they doing in there?

Why the hell do I even care about that?

So what if she didn't leave yet?

She's gone already. No, she's definitely still in there.

She didn't even know why she cared about it so much. Her thoughts were conflicting with each other.

That mysterious bug was crawling on her heart again.

That confusion alone felt unfamiliar and refreshing to her. It was a feeling she had never felt before. Did she feel uncomfortable with herself having that feeling?

What nonsense.

This feeling doesn't help me at all.

That feeling didn't help her with growing or in her relationship with Reinhardt.

Reinhardt was only doing his own thing. She had no reason to overstep his boundaries like that.

Friends. They were just friends, after all.

Although he was very precious to her, she decided to think of him as just a friend.

So she had to throw it away.

She had to throw away that feeling.

-Pak. Pak! Pak! Bam! Bam! Craaack!

"…"

Ellen was looking down at the completely broken and smashed training dummy, her eyes cold.

The dummy broke, not her training sword.

"A-ah."

Cliffman, who was beating a dummy not too far away, was frightened at seeing Ellen look down at the broken scarecrow with such ferocious eyes.

Could those things even break? What happened?

Cliffman looked at the scene as if he couldn't believe it.

"…What?"

Ellen asked curtly, looking at Cliffman, who was staring at her with fear in his eyes. He looked like he had something to say.

"Ah, erm- No. It's nothing… Nothing at all, Ma'am."

Without even being conscious of it, Cliffman started speaking formally to Ellen.

Reinhardt also didn't even show up at the restaurant in the evening.

Ellen slept badly that night.

CHAPTER 194

The ritual began around 10 am.

It was already past 1 am, long past bedtime. The ritual kept progressing. They didn't do something like roll calls, so there was nothing really to worry about.

Meanwhile, Olivia Lanze continued to fully concentrate without even drinking a drop of water.

I didn't have to, but I stayed with her as well. My hunger wasn't that great.

I couldn't tell how hard it was or how tired she was, so I felt rather restless watching her from the sidelines.

What could I do for her? Should I wipe off her sweat? To be honest, no one would have cared if I just went to sleep, but I didn't have such shameless thoughts.

So I just kept watching.

She was focusing on a single task for 12 hours straight without even trembling.

However, it certainly seemed to be working.

Over a long period of time, at an incredibly slow pace, her progress was visible to the naked eye.

The appearance of the cursed sword was changing as if it was shedding its outer skin.

The corrupted Tiamata was slowly returning to its original form—the darkened sword was gradually regaining its milky white color.

Olivia Lanze's purification ceremony was clearly working.

It didn't just return to being a Holy Sword in a tremendous brilliant white flash.

It was a gradual process.

However, like scales coming off one by one, as if the curse was getting burned away by the divine power, the cursed sword's layers came off one after the other, gradually getting dyed red and disappearing.

Slowly but surely, the Holy Sword was getting restored.

It wasn't a dramatic change, but it was a constant one.

"…"

Olivia silently sat in my shower room and continued to pray in the same posture in which she started.

I was watching that scene as if I had to witness it, leaning against one of my room's walls, the lights turned off.

Like Olivia Lanze, I didn't change my posture either, staying completely silent.

In that silence, the only thing that changed over that long period of time that felt like an eternity was the cursed sword.

And then…

When the last scale of the cursed sword had been peeled off…

"…It's over."

"You worked hard."

"…Yes."

With the first light of dawn, the ceremony had concluded.

"Get some rest. Thank you."

"Yeah… I should do that."

I helped Olivia Lanze, who didn't have the energy to stand up properly, up and led her to my bed. She fell asleep right away as if she had forced herself to stay conscious up until then.

I raised my hand towards the sword lying on the shower room floor.

-Sliiip…

The sword disappeared from the shower room floor and, before I knew it, appeared in my hand again.

With Tiamata's restoration, it seemed like its spirit bond with me had become complete. Olivia Lanze seemed to have taken over and finished what Dettomolian started.

The ivory-colored blade seemed to have a warmer texture than ordinary iron. The sword, which looked as if layers of it had come off, still didn't have a crossguard, but like on other Divine Relics, there were letters engraved in the Bo-Hi/blood groove cut in the middle of its milky white body.

I could read them.

[I shall purify the world with wrath.]

Wrath…

It was quite the ominous phrase to be engraved on a Holy Sword.

The Holy Sword Tiamata's restoration had been completed.

[Quest completed - Holy Sword Tiamata]

I was able to complete the reward that was given to me in a corrupted state.

[An additional reward shall be given]

[You were able to become Tiamata's owner as an effect of 'Sacred Spirit', a trait you share with Olivia Lanze.]

[Reward : You are able to share the Holy Sword Tiamata with Olivia Lanze.]

And it also came with an unexpected reward.

* * *

When I sent Tiamata back, it went into my desk drawer. It would move to the place I wanted to keep it. If I wanted to sense where the sword itself was, I could naturally grasp its location.

It was what one called true soul-bonding.

And I shared it with Olivia—it was an item under joint possession.

Olivia Lanze had fallen asleep as if she had fainted, and I was very tired as well.

Of course, I couldn't just sleep next to her, so I put Tiamata in a drawer, locked it, and went out into the hallway.

It wasn't time to wake up yet, so there was not a single soul in the hallway around early dawn.

I had planned on lying down on something like a sofa in the lobby to take a nap. I was dead tired. After fasting for a bit, I felt rather hungry as well.

It didn't matter if people found out about Tiamata in its purified state.

No matter if people could believe that the cursed sword was Tiamata or not, it was still the truth. What could they say when the results were like that?

The world was such a consequential thing. I was convinced that the cursed sword was a Holy Sword, so I managed to purify it and returned it to its original holy state. Temple just mistook the Relic as a demon god's Relic and had tried to discard or seal it.

No one could say anything against me because I was right.

The stress I received those past two days because of the corrupted Tiamata was no joke. It was to the point where I thought that my head might actually turn bald.

As I staggered into the lobby, I saw that someone was languidly sitting on the sofa.

It was Ellen.

"…What are you doing here?"

"…Nothing much."

Ellen was just blankly sitting on the sofa, and when she noticed that I was around, she looked at me. It also didn't seem like she was going out to do her early morning training, either.

Ellen seemed hesitant, so I asked her cautiously.

"Are you going out to train?"

"…No."

I sat opposite Ellen. I hadn't slept yet, but she didn't seem to intend to sleep at all.

Ellen didn't say anything.

I didn't say anything either.

It would be rather strange if I started explaining things to someone who didn't even ask.

It would seem like I was making up excuses out of nowhere for something she didn't even ask about. Well, I wouldn't know what to say either if she actually asked.

Still, I was able to fix everything somehow.

'Let's talk about it.'

'Let's just comfortably talk about it.'

'Even if it's a bit much… '

“Hey.”

“…Yes.”

“Promise me something."

“Promise you what?"

Ellen tilted her head at my sudden words.

“Don’t beat me up before you listen to everything I want to say.”

I don’t care if you want to hit me after you’re done listening, but don’t hit me while I’m explaining.

Just beat me up after I’m done…

Please…

“??”

Ellen looked bewildered because she didn’t know what I was talking about. I took Ellen to the quiet training room.

Even if we made a lot of noise, no one would be able to hear us while we were in there.

“Well… Actually, you know. About the demon god’s Relic. See, uhm. The thing is… I had it with me.”

“Wha… What? What did you say?”

Ellen didn’t seem to understand what I was trying to say for a bit.

“To be precise, it kept coming back to me, maybe because it thought of me as its owner… So it’s not like I stole it. It just kept coming back to me. Even after I threw it away, it would still re-appear in my room… That’s what happened. That’s all.”

‘Fuck.’

Her expression got worse by the minute, so I didn't even know what I was talking about anymore.

"…"

Ellen's expression turned cold. The atmosphere seemed to freeze up around us as I continued to talk.

Ellen was silently staring at me. She wasn't shouting at me or punching me…

She was just staring.

However, she obviously looked very angry.

Okay, tell me more.

That was what she seemed to try to tell me.

"Well… Do you want me to continue?"

"Yeah. Continue."

I felt like she would kill me if she noticed anything wrong.

* * *

Confronted with Ellen's cold eyes, I felt nervous as I finally managed to explain everything.

From the cursed sword suddenly appearing before me, to me requesting Olivia Lanze to help solve the problem somehow. And also how Olivia helped me by performing a purifying ceremony all night long after she found out that the cursed sword was Tiamata.

I hurriedly summoned TIamata to show it to Ellen.

"It can't be… It really was Tiamata…"

Ellen couldn't believe that the cursed sword had been transformed into Towan's divine Relic as if it shed its skin. However, even if she couldn't believe it, the truth

was right in front of her.

What was presumed to be a demon god's Divine Relic was Tiamata in a corrupted state. She had the facts presented right in front of her, so there was no point in trying to say anything more.

In the end, she only told me to leave it be because she thought it was a dangerous object, as we had witnessed in action, but that was the result of my actions.

We had actually recovered Towan's divine Relic from the Darklands, not a demon god's Relic. It would have been great enough to find a demon god's divine Relic, but recovering Towan's Relic, which had been lost 300 years ago, was bound to be treated as a huge achievement.

And I actually soul-bonded with the Holy Sword of Towan.

That meant that I was the god of Purity, Towan's champion as well.

"Ultimately… You were destined to have it… Was it something like that?"

The cursed sword didn't have an effect on me. Ellen seemed to think that it was inevitable for me to become Tiamata's owner in the end.

"It's just a coincidence. Senior didn't fall under its curse either."

"…That's possible."

I also explained to her that Olivia Lanze helped me purify the sword.

I sent back Tiamata, then glanced at Ellen.

"Uhm… I'm sorry. I didn't listen to you."

Now should be the time for her to get angry.

Just how many times did she tell me to throw that thing away. I had no words. No matter how good the result turned out to be, I landed in a dangerous situation because I had continued to act stubborn.

Ellen glanced at me with her mouth pulled in a slight pout.

“…Don’t mention it. Just don’t do something like that again.”

She clearly looked a little upset and shocked at first, but now her mood seemed to be a bit better. I was ready to take a hard beating. Ellen looked fine, if a little bit upset.

Did she… buy that?

“As you said, I won’t be uselessly greedy anymore. Until I die.”

I was being sincere.

Although the results were good, if I just made one wrong move, I would have to run away from Temple at best, and at worst, my head would have gone flying.

Of course, without going through that ordeal, I wouldn’t have obtained the great weapon called the Holy Sword Tiamata, however, things couldn't always end well.

Ellen took a deep breath as she sat down on the training room’s floor.

"So, what are you going to do now?”

“What?"

“Are you going to report to Temple that the cursed sword was actually Tiamata?”

Temple was still in chaos. All those people were probably still struggling to find that lost demon god’s Divine Relic.

Hiding Tiamata wasn’t difficult for me anymore. I could just summon and send it back from any place. It wasn’t necessary anymore to hide it in my room. I could even just throw it into the Irene River and call it whenever I needed it.

“I think it would be the right thing to report it, but…”

“It’ll get annoying. Very.”

“I know.”

There was a reason why Ellen was hiding the fact that she was Artorius’ sister and the owner of the Holy Sword Lament.

The people's high expectations as well as that useless popularity would pose a great annoyance to Ellen.

And people would implicitly exert a lot of pressure on her during her school time, naming her the next Hero.

"Don't tell them, this incident will soon be forgotten. As Tiamata, it won't cause any more major problems."

It would be a huge problem if it was a true Relic of a demon god, but as it returned to being Tiamata, there wouldn't be any more problems, so Ellen seemed to think that it would be better to just hide that I had become Tiamata's owner.

"Yeah, that would be for the best."

They would make a huge fuss to find the lost demon god's divine Relic, but in the end, if nothing more happened for a certain period of time, like with the terrorist attack on the Capital last time, things would eventually quiet down.

* * *

The cursed sword problem had been solved, and the Holy Sword Tiamata had been restored again.

And, prepared to take a beating from Ellen, I told her the whole truth about the incident.

Ellen seemed upset but also relieved that all the problems had been solved in the end.

Ellen and I sat with our backs against the training room's wall.

"Did you not sleep at all?"

Ellen noticed that I didn't look so good as asked me.

"…Yeah. I couldn't just sleep comfortably while someone was working through the night because of me."

"…I see."

She wouldn't have cared if I slept or not, but I had just kept watching her perform the ritual until the very end out of a sense of guilt, regret, and gratitude.

"I left her sleeping in my bed, so I tried to sleep in the lobby. But then I met you… Well, and we ended up talking like this."

"Ah."

Ellen's eyes widened slightly, as she realized that I was on the verge of dying from exhaustion and that I actually couldn't sleep because of her.

"…Sleep here."

"I'll do just that."

I lay down on the training room's floor.

The floor was pretty hard, but I was dead tired, so it didn't really feel uncomfortable

* * *

Ellen looked at Reinhardt, who was lying on his back, sleeping.

The bug that had been crawling on her heart was gone.

She was angry. She felt so upset when she heard what had happened.

She was beside herself with rage. She told him so many times, but he eventually gave in to his greed and got himself into a dangerous situation.

Still, she held it in, thinking that she should listen to his whole story first.

However, as she listened to his story, Ellen found herself unnoticeably freed of her anger. She thought that she should be angry because Reinhardt obviously got himself into danger because he did something stupid.

However, her anger had already dissipated, so she couldn't hold on to that rage anymore.

She only had one thought in her mind:

She didn't really care much about the Holy Sword Tiamata. She was only slightly surprised by the sudden appearance of something as important as a divine Relic of the five gods.

Okay.

That's how it was.

That's what happened.

It couldn't have been anything like that.

There was a reason for everything.

Her thoughts were filled with such a strange feeling that all her feelings of relief, slight disappointment, and that unknown feeling immediately disappeared.

The recovery of the Holy Sword Tiamata…

The world would most certainly be surprised by it, but Ellen wasn't really.

Rather, it seemed something else was of much more importance to her.

Ellen hugged her knees as she stared at Reinhardt, who had fallen asleep as soon as he closed his eyes.

She seemed like a child looking closely at some animal she had seen for the first time out of pure curiosity.

She had looked at him so many times, but it felt like she was looking at him for the first time.

At that moment, Ellen seemed as if she was looking at Reinhardt for the first time in her life.

She thought that it should be quite uncomfortable for him to sleep like that.

Ellen loosened her arms around her knees and stretched out her legs.

Then she lifted Reinhardt's head slightly and placed it on her thighs.

I'm doing this because sleeping on the floor like that should be rather uncomfortable.

That's the only reason.

Just because he'd feel uncomfortable.

And I'm sorry…

Sorry for misunderstanding.

I'm sorry for being suspicious of you and getting angry.

I'm just doing this because I feel sorry…

I chose not to think about these things anymore.

Just what is wrong with me?

I decided not to think about it.

Ellen carefully ran her fingers through the sleeping Reinhardt's hair.

She then started to smile slightly without realizing.

CHAPTER 195

This incident had come to a close.

The most worrisome thing in that situation was that Dettomolian might have to suffer quite a bit because of me.

It seemed like he had already returned to the dormitory after he had been investigated throughout Saturday, maybe because he was a Temple student or because the investigation revealed that they had reached a dead end.

Olivia Lanze had already realized that she and I were the joint owners of the Holy Sword.

“Well, I don’t really want to use it, so I think it should be all yours, Reinhardt.”

Olivia Lanze tried to help me regardless of it being a Holy Sword or not, so she seemed a little soured that she was also soul-bound to Tiamata.

By the way, that girl slept in my room until after lunchtime like that.

Despite seeing her disheveled state, her beauty hadn’t been ruined… What? How come her beauty hadn’t reduced even after just waking up?

“Hrmmmm!"

Olivia Lanze stretched and then slowly opened her eyes and looked at me.

“By the way, I want to show you something really interesting, Reinhardt.”

“Wh-what would that be…?"

If it was something weird, I didn’t want to see it! Sh-she shouldn’t! It couldn’t be that she had gotten used to all that in just a single day or something like that, right?

“Look at this.”

Olivia Lanze raised her right hand and closed her eyes.

-*Uuung*

“…What is this?”

I couldn’t help but be shocked at the energy gathering around Olivia Lanze’s hand.

That young lady was able to use tremendous amounts of divine power. Just the day before I saw her using Towan’s divine power during the ceremony.

“Hehe… I think I understood the true nature of divine power.”

However, the energy enveloping Olivia Lanze’s hand was too evil and too dark to be considered Towan’s divine power.

“No way… This… Is it that?”

“Yeah.”

I felt a certain insidiousness, completely different from before, emitting from Olivia Lanze’s eyes as she opened them.

“I think I now know how to use the power of Towan’s other side, so to speak, Kier’s power.”

Towan was Kier.

Olivia had understood that Towan's divine power could also be used as its opposing force if one manifested in a different way.

And the day before, while performing the ceremony to restore Towan’s Relic to its original state, she seemed to have understood the principle behind that power.

It looked like Olivia Lanze was able to use Towan’s divine power, the power of purity, as well as the power of the demon god Kier, the god of Corruption.

She was able to use both sides of that divine power even though they were

completely different from each other.

The power of purity, and the power of corruption.

“Does that mean… I’m the only true believer of Towan? That’s kind of funny.”

She was able to completely understand her Goddess because she forsook her. She might be able to call herself the one and only true believer of Towan for understanding her power as well as her ambivalence, enabling her to both use the power of Towan, who she abandoned, and Kier’s power.

Anyway, Olivia Lanze had become the only person in the world who could use both the power of a goddess and a demon god.

Just what should I say?

I felt like I had just witnessed the birth of a monster, an event much more important than the Holy Sword, Tiamata’s appearance.

“Ah, so what about this?”

-Blink

Sitting in the bed, Olivia Lanze summoned the Holy Sword Tiamata to her hand. As we were sharing its ownership, Tiamata was mine as well as Olivia Lanze’s.

She looked at me with a sinister smile on her lips and an ominous gaze in her eyes.

"Should I corrupt the restored Holy Sword Tiamata and turn it back into the demon sword Tiamata again?”

"Wh-what are you talking about, you bastard!”

Hey, I’m just kidding, just kidding-.”

If I hadn’t stopped her, she would have totally done it!

Ultimately, it was true that Olivia Lanze had saved me from a serious crisis. To be exact, I wouldn’t have been able to use the item in its cursed state, but I was very pleased that the soul-bond had been properly established so that I could completely

control Tiamata.

It was a secret that I had the Holy Sword in my possession, so, as I had thought, I dumped it at the bottom of the Irene River where no one would find it. I didn't even have to go there to place it there. Just by thinking of sending it there, I could feel that it actually traveled to that place.

Although I had saved Olivia Lanze's life, I still expressed my gratitude in my own way.

Olivia was quite magnanimous.

She said, "If you're so grateful, just buy me a meal later", and went back to her own room to rest for the remainder of the day.

* * *

Ellen felt rather refreshed, so after Reinhardt woke up and went back to his room, she also returned to her room to wash up.

Sunday…

She couldn't concentrate properly the day before, so she wanted to try to stay a little more focused. Reinhardt might also come to the gym, as the problem holding him back had been resolved.

Of course, he might not come if something else happened, but what would she do if he didn't?

Ellen left her private room to go to the gym when her eye met with someone else's.

—Someone who looked slightly tired but couldn't help but draw others' attention nevertheless.

It was Olivia Lanze, the senior who had helped Reinhardt.

She had probably spent the whole day in Reinhardt's room and was just then returning to her own dorm.

"…?"

Olivia Lanze tilted her head as Ellen looked at her.

“Oh, you’re Reinhardt’s friend, right?”

“Ah… Yes.”

“Do you have something to say to me?"

Reinhardt had certainly been in danger. He would have been in huge trouble if that person hadn’t helped him.

In that case, she should have felt grateful towards her. Before, she had felt weird and offended for no reason whatsoever, so now she felt guilty towards her.

She felt like she showed contempt to the person who helped Reinhardt with nothing but good intentions for no reason. Ellen looked around.

No one was around them.

“Thank you very much. Erm… I heard that you helped Reinhardt. It must have been really hard, but thank you for helping him.”

“Ah, yes. You’re really close to Reinhardt, aren’t you?”

Olivia only smiled sweetly and nodded whole saying that she only did what she should have done.

She really was someone who helped Reinhardt with pure intentions.

Ellen became a little ashamed of herself for that feeling she felt yesterday.

"By the way, you do know that Reinhardt is mine, right?”

“…What?”

Olivia showed her a slightly sinister smile as she left her with those words. Ellen only stared at Olivia’s back.

At the same time…

I don't like that person.

I like Harriet, so why do I hate that person?

Ellen couldn't explain why she felt that way.

* * *

Getting my hands on Tiamata didn't really change anything.

Unless a huge incident like an army of undead appeared in the capital, I had no real use for it. I wasn't sure if I would go back to Darklands again or not, but even then, the item was only powerful against undead monsters.

Of course, according to what Olivia Lanze had demonstrated, Tiamata could also use its opposing power.

Although she was joking, it was true that she would be able to corrupt the restored Tiamata again.

The Holy Sword Tiamata was a weapon that could exert incredible strength against unclean beings.

In its cursed state, on the other hand, the Demonic Sword Tiamata could make use of its opposing power.

It would exert its absolute power to eliminate the living.

In the end, Tiamata could become a weapon that would exert absolute power against both the living and dead, depending on whether it is used in its original or corrupted state.

Of course, it was impossible for me, who couldn't wield divine power, so I would need Olivia Lanze's help.

It was both a Holy Sword and a Demonic Sword at the same time.

With Olivia's help, Tiamata could become a very versatile weapon.

Of course, it would be best not to use it in its corrupted state. However, I did know

that I would definitely end up having to use it someday.

Monday…

After our common classes ended…

“What did you say? You want to treat Detto to a meal?”

“He went through a lot because of me, so I should pay him back somehow.”

“…Seeing you care about such things sure is really surprising, isn’t it?”

I was heading towards Main Street with Dettomolian and Charlotte de Gardias on my way back from school.

* * *

It seemed like B-8 Dettomolian didn’t have to go through anything bad. Still, he was a suspect. Anyway, he was released, in the end, at my request.

Tiamata was secured as well, and I was just as indebted to that guy as I was to Olivia Lanze.

I personally felt quite sorry for him because of various things, so I wanted to do something for him, even if I didn’t know the details of what went down.

In the end, he also told me that all I needed to do was buy him a meal.

And I didn’t actually call Charlotte; she simply tagged along.

When I said that I would buy Dettomolian a meal when I was in Class B’s dorm, Charlotte tagged along with me as if she just witnessed something incredible.

It seemed like the Princess had a lot of time to spare.

Still, I was rather happy with the outcome.

Dettomolian was originally quite the gloomy and silent guy, so when I told him I’d

buy him a meal, he simply followed me, however, he didn't really say anything.

That silence devoid of conversation was resolved by Charlotte, who tagged along out of boredom.

"Siigh… I won't ever get used to those swimming lessons. I'm dead tired."

It was still September. The last lesson among our common P.E. classes were still swimming lessons, as the days were still rather warm. Still, I didn't feel as tired as I did when we first started our lessons.

Dettomolian was also tired, but he didn't seem like he was about to die of exhaustion.

"Is there anything you want to eat?"

"…Sashimi. Beef Tartare."

What should I say?

It was kind of like him, wasn't it?

Of course, I knew that him hailing from a primitive northern tribe didn't have anything to do with him wanting to eat raw food.

How should I put it…?

It just seemed to fit him…

I looked towards Charlotte.

"Are you fine with that?"

"Huh? I told you I don't really care about what we eat."

In the end, we decided to go for beef tartare.

* * *

I was aware of the fact that there were all kinds of restaurants located inside of Temple, but I didn't expect there to be a restaurant specializing in beef tartare.

Dettomolian seemed to go to that place often on his own, so he led the way.

He continuously ate pieces of beef tartare, opening his eyes wide as if that was the first time eating something like that, then he stuffed more into his mouth.

Like the real thing.

I knew it was really disrespectful and rude to think about him like that, and I did feel sorry for him, but…

Seeing the skinny Dettomolian stuffing his face with beef tartare was a little…

Anyway, it just sort of felt like that!

Of course, the taste of the dish itself was pretty decent.

Most of the food sold at Temple was made from the best ingredients.

“Detto, try this too. It’s very delicious.”

“Yes…”

By the way, Charlotte had been calling Dettomolian by his nickname, so I kind of felt like shit on the inside.

Wasn’t I the epitome of a twisted hypocrite?

Did she call others by nicknames as well?

Or was it just her classmates?

“Do you usually treat everyone like that?”

“Huh? Ah…”

Charlotte smiled bashfully when I asked her that as I watched her putting aside various things for Dettomolian.

“Hm… Well, it’s just… he reminds me of the past, so… I just do these things unconsciously…”

Oh.

Was it like that?

Dettomolian always looked as if he was starving. The reason for that was because I set him up as the scrawniest anchovy that would never gain any weight in this world. That was why Charlotte was taking care of him like that—it reminded her of when she was nearly starving to death in the Demon Realm.

Wh-what the…

What a sad reason for taking care of someone…

“No matter how much I eat… I won’t gain weight…”

When Ellen said something like that, the other girls looked at her as if to say “Are you bragging?”. Even though that guy said exactly the same thing, he looked kind of sad.

Then what if he ate butter bibimbap every day? Wouldn’t he gain weight then?

Well, before he gained weight, he might actually get heart problems first, right?

“Erm, well… Anyway, I'm sorry. I dragged you into this. You must have had a hard time.”

That was the main point of all of that.

“Aside from just buying a meal, I do have some money, even though I’m like this. And if you don’t want to have any money, just tell me if you need any help or want me to get you something.”

It was unknown to me what would have happened if the priest of Towan decided to actually make a move. I wasn’t all that sure if Temple or Charlotte would have been able to protect him, so Dettomolian certainly was in a great deal of danger because of my unnecessary request.

I couldn’t even tell him the truth about everything, so I felt double the guilt. Dettomolian slowly shook his head at my words.

“It’s okay… Temple prepares… anything I would need…”

He answered slowly while still stuffing himself with the meat.

"I'll tell you… If I need help with anything…"

'A-ah… Okay."

I wondered what Dettomolian would need help with.

I hoped it didn't have anything to do with ghosts…

Although I would be able to exorcise any ghost with the Holy Sword in one shot… I couldn't be sure I wouldn't die of a heart attack before I could! I was the kind of person who had died from a heart attack just by reading some malicious comments before!

Dettomolian would let me know later if he needed help with something, so it seemed like things were settled for the time being.

I wasn't sure what reputation that guy had in Class B at the moment. However, in the original, everyone still felt quite reluctant towards him.

He had a gloomy air about him, was quiet, and always muttered strange things to himself.

However, because he had the invincible connection, Charlotte, who was taking care of him by his side, I wondered if he had gotten closer to the others.

"By the way, out of curiosity, what were you trying to achieve with the ritual the other day?"

"Ah. That…"

Charlotte wasn't there to witness it in person, but she must have gotten briefed on it. Dettomolian had attempted to perform a ritual on the cursed sword, after which it just up and disappeared.

Dettomolian began to explain as he continued to nibble on the beef tartare.

“I wanted to talk to it.”

“…Talk to it?"

“I was trying to communicate with the energy housing the sword… But the energy was dormant… So I tried to slowly wake it up until it would be able to answer me… Well, I managed to half-awaken it, only getting very little information from it… Then the ritual got interrupted mid-way.”

Primordial magic…

It was completely different from the modern standardized magic we knew. Dettomolian had been trying to talk to the energy inhabiting the sword itself.

But he couldn’t communicate with it properly because it was asleep, so he had kept poking it until it had woken up.

Hey, are you asleep? Hey, wake up! Hey, I got something to say. Huh? You don’t want to wake up? Even if I do this? Or that? You’re strong. You’re still not waking up.

Something like that?

It seemed to have woken up slightly, enough that he managed to grasp something akin to sleep talk, but the ritual got interrupted in the middle.

In the end, he managed to awaken Tiamata’s weakened energy while trying to talk to it; that was why the sword suddenly moved to my room and why the soul-bond between me and it was so awkward.

Then, if things had continued like that, the energy of Tiamata in its corrupted state might have fully awakened.

Olivia Lanze had managed to return it to its state as a Holy Sword, but if Tiamata got awakened in its corrupted state, wouldn’t that have caused a huge accident? Anyway, I was still its owner.

In the end, we wouldn’t know if things would have gotten dangerous if Dettomolian finished the ritual.

It was good enough that no accidents happened after it got stopped in the middle.

"By the way, are you sure that it was a demon god's divine Relic?"

Charlotte tilted her head.

"I'm not… Sure either… All I know is… that it's something very old…"

"Hmm, is that so?"

The one who started assuming that it was a demon god's divine Relic wasn't Dettomolian but one of the high priests who were in charge of securing the safety of everyone during the ritual. It wasn't actually confirmed that it was a demon god's divine Relic.

I eventually managed to apologize to Dettomolian, and we continued to eat.

With that, I decided to wrap things up and continue to focus on my life in Temple again.

"By the way, what exactly is sorcery? I'm really curious about it."

"…What?"

Charlotte tilted her head as Dettomolian stared at her.

"I don't know about it, you know? It feels like you can do a lot with it. You managed to find out things that Temple's black magicians weren't able to find out, right?"

"I wasn't able to find out everything, though…"

"But you found out a little bit, right?"

Dettomolian shuddered slightly at Charlotte's praise.

'What the hell. Is he acting shy now?'

"Erm… Actually, when I visited Detto's club room the other day… It seemed a bit creepy. I think I misunderstood, though. I'm really sorry."

"It's fine… Everyone is like that…"

He responded as if it was nothing new.

“But Detto, really, just what exactly is sorcery?”

“…What do you mean?”

“Well… In magic, there are the fields of destruction magic, illusion magic, alchemy, enchantment, and magic crafting. One would roughly know what kind of magic they encompass, right? But sorcery is… I mean, I know that you can do a lot with it, but I can’t think of anything specific. So what’s the difference between sorcery and magic?”

“Well……”

Because Charlotte had mentioned it, I started to wonder about it as well.

Of course, I was the one who had set up Dettomolian’s talent to be sorcery, but as he isn’t the main character, I didn’t really delve into it that much.

To put it bluntly, specializations like destruction magic, illusion magic, alchemy, enchantment, and magic crafting were all just types of magic.

Sorcery couldn’t be categorized as just a type. Sorcery was primordial magic, and in the past, sorcery was referred to as just magic.

That meant that sorcery referred to something like universal magic—it didn’t just describe a type of magic.

So, simply put, even though Harriet had a talent to master any type of magic, she wasn’t able to use sorcery because it wasn’t just a type of magic, and she didn’t have a sorcery talent. Sorcery was the magic that existed before our magic.

On the other hand, Dettomolian didn’t have a talent pertaining to modern magic but could master any technique of sorcery.

Sorcery was a comprehensive talent as well, after all.

That was how I had set it up. But how would Dettomolian, the owner of that talent, explain it?

“If I had to name a clear difference between magic and sorcery it would be… The clarity of causality…”

“Clarity of causality?”

Charlotte had a bad feeling about that. However, I kind of understood what he was talking about.

“Magic has magic formulas and certain methods of mana management to use the spell Fireball… If you follow these certain procedures, the spell named Fireball will be activated… But it isn’t like that for sorcery…”

“Ah… I get it. You mean that there are no standardized techniques, right?”

“Something like that… Even if one tried to use the same spell, sometimes its effects would be more powerful, other times it doesn’t even activate… Or it could even lead to a completely different outcome…”

Sorcery was an ancient magic system whose causes and effects were really vague.

It was also called Super Random Magic. (Aren: This sounds a bit lame… I’d call it Roulette Magic but well Super Random Magic was written in there)

After hearing his explanation, Charlotte looked a little tired.

“It… it seems rather dangerous…”

“I’m careful when using it…”

Although he said he would take precautions, we wouldn’t know how careful he was really acting. Charlotte nodded as if she understood him somehow. Seeing that Charlotte was a little scared, Dettomolian shook his head.

“Well… Not all rituals and ceremonies are necessarily dangerous… There are many simple ones… Astrology, physiognomy, palm reading… Rituals pertaining to fortune telling and clairvoyance…”

Palm reading and physiognomy.

Charlotte tilted her head, seeming as if these things were familiar concepts to her

even if they weren't really considered magic.

"Do you also use sorcery to do these kinds of things?"

"Yes, sorcery is… more about perceiving vague things, in the end… I'm rather used to performing these kinds of rituals…"

In other words, it was more likely to see a sorcerer telling someone's fortune or holding blessing rituals than performing rain dances.

"So something like foresight? Can you predict the future?"

"As I said… I don't know how to put it."

Then Dettomolian looked at me and Charlotte alternately before asking us in a low voice.

"Do you… want to see it in action?"

"Now? Can you do something like that right now?"

N-no.

I felt a little scared because it seemed like he was going to predict an ominous and dark future for us. However, Charlotte was looking at him with shining eyes brimming with curiosity. I felt a bit nervous when Charlotte smiled at me.

"How about it, Reinhardt? It looks fun."

"Huh, what?… Fine."

Charlotte seemed so excited although he tried to look serious, so I nodded my head even though I didn't want to.

"Keep in mind that I'm just saying what I'm seeing… I don't know any specifics… Even if you ask me… Just remember that I don't know everything…"

"Yes, got it."

"…Okay."

Dettomolian stared at Charlotte for about three minutes, doing the same for me.

He didn't say anything and just stared at us, so I almost felt myself break out in cold sweat.

"Your palms…"

"Ah, yes. Here."

Dettomolian gazed at Charlotte's palm. Afterwards, he also checked mine.

…By the way, were my palms still the same as when I was Valier?

I actually wasn't sure. Then there was my face…

Wasn't it pretty meaningless performing physiognomy on me the way I was at the moment?

"Both of you… Have a secret you can never reveal to anyone…"

"!"

"!"

At those words, mine as well as Charlotte's expressions completely hardened. What? What did he see to come to that conclusion?

Charlotte's and my eyes met.

Charlotte knew some of my secrets. I was the successor to the Rotary Gang and I knew "Valier's" whereabouts.

And I knew some of Charlotte's secrets as well. She had been helped by a boy named "Valier", and she was in contact with him, keeping it a secret from Bertus, and she also had an unknown supernatural power.

Secrets that we couldn't tell anyone.

Charlotte knew some of my secrets, so she thought I knew what I was hiding, but the reality looked very different.

I had many secrets, one being that I created this world—something no one would believe even if I told them.

He might be wrong, and he wouldn't know any details, he was just saying what he saw.

However, Dettomolian quickly found out that both of us held secrets.

I could feel goosebumps spreading all over my body.

Then Dettomolian stared at me.

"…Reinhardt. You… have to behave yourself."

"…What?"

"Otherwise, you're going to have some trouble with women…"

"…"

…

I couldn't say anything, as I couldn't really refute that something like that might happen.

Hearing him say that I should be on my best behavior made cold sweat run down my back. Actually, I hadn't done anything recently. However, I knew that I was a bit of a bastard.

However, having it pointed out directly like that… How should I put it?

I had nothing to say! What should I do?!

"Ah… Yeah, that's something one could find out even without fortune telling… Reinhardt is a bit of a delinquent, after all, right?

Charlotte looked at me with a pitying smile tugging at her lips. She seemed to be able to tell that something like that might happen without even knowing how to palm read because all the people I was close to were mostly girls, after all. But wasn't that gaze just too much? Didn't she look at me as if I was pathetic?

“You hear, Reinhardt? Just do as Detto said, and…”

“And… Charlotte.”

“Ah, uh…”

“You will marry Reinhardt."

“…Huh?”

Charlotte was taken aback by that sudden declaration.

CHAPTER 196

Charlotte would marry me.

Not only Charlotte was shocked by that outrageous statement, but the same was also true for me.

“Hey, what the hell? What nonsense are you spouting all of a sudden?”

At my words, Dettomolian looked at me intently.

“I… was just telling you what I saw…”

"N-no, I mean. How does this even make any sense?”

"W-well… Yeah, he’s right. I-I don’t want to put it like this, but… I’m, erm, part of the Imperial Family, right?”

Charlotte’s face turned white as she spoke, and the corners of her mouth were twitching. She didn’t want to say something like, “I’m part of the Imperial Family and Reinhardt is just a commoner, so how could we ever get married?”, because we were in Temple, but she couldn’t help it because he had predicted something so ridiculous.

“People don’t know… how things might happen…”

Yeah, that made sense. No one would know when, where, what, and how things might happen.

But I still had goosebumps running up my back.

I wasn’t really sure, but did that mean that Charlotte would find out later that I was Valier? So was he telling me that after that I would end up marrying Charlotte or whatever because things turned out well between us?

No. Before that…

Wouldn’t that actually make Charlotte suspect that I was Valier? If Charlotte began

harboring such doubts, her discovery of my true identity wouldn't be too far off in the future.

That would be a big problem.

Things would get really complicated if Charlotte came to strange conclusions after simply trying to get her fortune read.

"As I just told you… I only told you what I saw…"

"Yeah! Then you interpreted it wrong! A-ahaha. Well, I'm not doubting your ability. though. It just doesn't make sense, right? Just how huge is the difference in our status? Yeah. That would be a big problem. S-setting our difference in status apart, it's something that could never happen! Of course!"

"Tha-that's… That's true, right? Yes."

Charlotte nodded with a bewildered expression on her face.

"That's right. Something so nonsensical could never happen."

I had to cut things off before Charlotte started to misunderstand iy in a weird way. Dettomolian did say that there was a possibility for his readings to be wrong.

"Indeed! Me… Me marrying Reinhardt? Ha, th-that's preposterous! It's impossible!"

"I-I mean, how could something like that even happen? Yeah, there's no way, right?"

Charlotte and I made eye contact as we were both denying that something like that would happen in the future.

"…"

"…"

Somehow…

We ended up not being able to properly look at each other anymore.

* * *

After returning to Royal Class' dormitory, Charlotte took off her uniform and washed herself in the shower.

She had just asked him to read her fortune for fun, but she was shocked that he found out that she had a secret she couldn't tell anyone. At that time, her spine had turned numb.

He didn't know what kind of secret it was, but she did guess that she held one such secret. Sorcery was something to be feared; it was such a strange power—that was what she thought.

"Hah. No way."

However, the words that followed were ridiculous.

Reinhardt and herself were to be married. As soon as she heard that, she was completely dumbfounded, not sure what he was even talking about anymore. Her brain stopped functioning for a second and she didn't know what she should say to that.

Marrying Reinhardt…

If she had to give an example for something with a 0% possibility, that would be it.

Since there was a huge gap in their status, they would obviously face opposition from the Imperial Family, and that would be the end of it. Even most of the great nobles couldn't even be considered to be candidates for the position of her husband. But a beggar, not even a commoner, who was even part of a criminal organization, even if he managed to get into Temple, becoming her husband?

That was ridiculous.

Charlotte never thought of Reinhardt as more than a friend to begin with.

She wasn't so sure if it was that boy. If it was him, she might do whatever it took, even going against the Imperial Family's opposition.

Even if she had to leave the Imperial Family. If that was the case, she wasn't so sure.

But Reinhardt?

Dettomolian simply answered that people wouldn't know what might happen. Charlotte knew that as well. No one could tell what someone might end up doing.

Just like she was one day suddenly kidnapped by the Demon King after living a blissful life in the Imperial Family where everything got provided to her, it was just what a human's life was like.

So…

The only one who knew the whereabouts of that boy was the wizard named Elena.

And Reinhardt was something like a link between her and the boy.

What if something ended up happening to him in the future?

Reinhardt was the only one Charlotte could consult regarding the boy.

If she ended up leaning on him too much, ending up becoming dependent on him…

Was it really so impossible then?

No one knew what might happen.

It might not be as impossible as she thought. Could she be sure that it was impossible for her to end up falling in love with Reinhardt?

"What… What am I even thinking…?"

When she was working on a task she would always think about the worst-case scenario first, so she was the same thing right that moment. She was thinking about what might happen if something happened to the boy that she might seek solace in Reinhardt.

That was just too rude to the boy and Reinhardt.

It was impossible. She wasn't doubting Dettomolian's abilities, but there was no reason for her to get swayed by his words. Didn't he say that he might interpret things wrong himself?

And while it was true that she thought that way, what about Reinhardt?

His reaction also showed that he thought it was something absolutely impossible.

He vehemently denied it. With great intensity as well.

"…"

No.

Charlotte felt quite strange when she thought about it.

No, what did he say again?

'…What nonsense are you sprouting?'

He was right, it was nonsense. He had been denying it so vehemently, even seeming a little angry.

Did he have to go that far?

What was there to be dissatisfied about?

Although they were living irrespective of their actual status as Temple status, she was a noble Princess only second to the Emperor on the continent.

She was quite proud to say that she wasn't lacking in intellect, financial power, or ability.

Her character… was quite good, if she had to say so herself.

But who did that lowly guy think he was?

That type of guy whom she wouldn't even spare a glance usually even if he went to his knees and begged?

What did he dare to say?

He had the personality of a filthy scumbag, was of low status, and had a lot of bad rumors about his private life floating around the campus. The only good thing about him was his face.

It was just crazy.

Her marrying that kind of guy?

How ridiculous.

However, if she seriously thought about it, he wasn't necessarily like that.

It was true that he had quite a dirty personality and that he acted quite violently, but in the end, he helped her keep her secret as well as he did. He might have been close to Bertus, but he didn't hesitate to be friendly with her as well.

She knew that the rumors about his private life were just people's misunderstandings and simple gossip.

He was courageous, bold, and quite skilled. Rather than just being skilled, there weren't many people in their classes who could compare to him.

If she thought about it…

If she thought about it really, really hard…

His status put aside, he could be evaluated as a great guy.

"…"

As she thought about it, Charlotte had to admit it.

It was true that he was only paying attention to him because of the boy and that she didn't think much else of Reinhardt.

However, Dettomolian's sudden remarks led Charlotte to constantly think about Reinhardt out of the blue, making her feel a little strange.

"…Ridiculous."

However, in the end, Charlotte got mad because Reinhardt denied her so intensely that she ended up punching her shower's wall.

-Thump! Thump!

Of course, she wasn't able to produce loud sounds with her weak-ass body, so Charlotte just lightly punched out.

Even if she gave herself to him, he wouldn't have her.

Even if she actually liked him, she would get rejected by him. *What? How could that even happen?*

Right then, there was nothing she was able to do, but if she became Empress, there would be no one, not even the Imperial Family, that would be able to object to her decisions or something.

But what did he dislike about her? Wasn't he too much?

Charlotte was upset as she looked in her mirror while she was getting drenched by the shower's water.

She saw herself in the mirror.

"…"

Charlotte angrily glared at the mirror, thinking of the only reason why he might dislike her so much.

'Am I… not attractive?'

She was just blankly staring at her own reflection.

That was when Charlotte suddenly realized that she wouldn't be able to view herself in an objective light.

* * *

With no time to organize my thoughts, I briefly left on Monday night.

I felt like it was necessary to tell my people about the thing with the Holy Sword Tiamata.

But seriously, I was still quite confused by Dettomolian's words.

Charlotte and I would get married?

Of course, it was also quite possible that he had interpreted it wrong, so it didn't necessarily mean that it would absolutely happen.

However, if it was true, why would something like that happen?

She would find out that I was Valier and forgive me for how I acted in the end. Was that how it would happen?

Still, my status was basically completely incompatible with the Imperial Family. My standing was only possible because I was a Temple student. Assuming Charlotte would become Empress, there was a good chance that wouldn't want to marry me. Of course, it would be a different story if Charlotte made use of her imperial power to force a wedding despite objections being voiced.

Or Charlotte might lose in the fight for the throne, run away somewhere, and would marry me anyway—it might turn out like that as well.

Of course, if what he saw would really happen, although the process was unknown, there was only one result…

Charlotte and I would safely survive through the Gate incident. It meant that I would reach a certain ending, in other words, marriage.

If Dettomolian's words were true, the important part wasn't the possible marriage, but the fact that we would survive.

All those lofty thoughts made my mind feel rather complicated.

And…

It felt rather strange to suddenly think why it would happen if it actually took place and what the outcome would be, aside from some kind of personal hope.

I didn't even think about whether I liked her or not.

As I walked out of Temple and down the street, a sudden thought occurred to me.

—I was so obsessed with that baseless causal inference that I felt like something important within me was gradually disappearing.

* * *

“Is it here?”

“Yes, my Lord.”

I had just arrived at Eleris’ new residence.

It was near Aligar’s shopping district. Eleris had bought a semi-basement, as she had dreamed of, and immediately moved there.

Her expression showed just how fond she was of it.

…It was damp and humid, but Eleris seemed to like it. That vampire who used the pain caused by the morning sun as an alarm before had certainly looked more than pitiful. That certainly wouldn't happen there.

She seemed to have found a good apartment.

There were no annoying neighbors, and because the upper floor was a shopping mall and not a residential area, it would be empty of all people at night. Eleris’s preparations were meticulous, so she managed to get a room in a place that was eerie and pretty much unpopulated, so it was okay for me to visit from time to time.

Seeing Eleris that happy with her new apartment made me feel slightly happy as well.

However, under normal circumstances, that place wasn’t where people usually wanted to live.

First of all, I didn’t know if it was because there were just too few household items in there, but it felt like a haunted house.

“It needs some cleaning up, but I’ll do that little by little. I also want to have some decor this time.”

The atmosphere of that damp and gloomy apartment and Eleris, who was contemplating how she should decorate her new house, were quite the mismatch.

'…She'd use normal decorations, right? She wasn't going to put a coffin in there, right?'

"By the way, what brings you here?"

"Ah, about that."

It was dangerous to visit her often just because I felt bored, so I wouldn't go for no reason unless it was to deliver Charlotte's letters or something.

"Do you remember the sword from the Darklands?"

"…Yeah, did Temple find out what it was?"

"Well, yeah… though it wasn't really Temple who found out."

It was rather hard to show her.

"It turned out to be the Holy Sword Tiamata."

"…What?"

Eleris, obviously, couldn't understand what I was telling her.

CHAPTER 197

Even after my lengthy explanation about the circumstances of the Holy Sword Tiamata was over, Eleris looked puzzled.

So it wasn't until I finally showed her Tiamata, to which I was spirit bonded, that she understood the situation.

However, it was quite problematic because she reacted to it as violently as a terrified vampire faced with garlic.

She was even more startled than the time when she was directly hit by the sun. She jumped out of her apartment and clung to a wall as if she was about to make her escape, trembling.

"…Do the undead take damage just by looking at this Holy Sword?"

"That… that's not it, but… Well, maybe. Since it's our polar opposite…"

Eleris sighed in relief when I sent Tiamata back. She explained that she didn't take any damage, but she felt like shivering just by looking at it.

"How fascinating… That the sword actually turned out to be Tiamata…"

Eleris seemed very surprised by the fact that the Holy Sword Tiamata could actually be corrupted in such a way.

"I would like to congratulate you for becoming the master of a Holy Sword, but… Well, for me, it's just… Yeah."

"I know what you mean."

Since I had become the master of a weapon most lethal to her, Eleris seemed a little terrified.

"Still, thank you for telling me."

Eleris thanked me, seeing my honesty about Tiamata as proof that I trusted her.

Eleris and I had been talking for a long time about the difference between the demon gods and the orthodox gods. In the end, the word “orthodox” was completely meaningless, as the gods’ power would vary depending on one’s direction of belief.

Olivia Lanze was able to use the power of Kier after she had changed the way she used Towan’s power.

“Gods seem to be even stranger than we first imagined.”

“Indeed.”

That problem came to be because I didn’t set them up properly.

"But I don’t really need this thing. I just happened to get my hands on it.”

If I continued to take classes in Temple and sparred with Ellen, I would become strong on my own. And although Tiamata was a powerful weapon, it was very limited.

There was no way I would get to fight undead monsters there, and even if it was the corrupted Tiamata, wouldn’t that mean that I would have to kill people to raise them as undead? My conscience wouldn’t be able to allow that to begin with.

I had brought it with me because it was something good, and it was true that it turned out to be an even better item than I expected, but in the end, there was nothing I needed to use it for.

Eleris was lost in thought, as she kept her mouth closed as if she was agonizing over what I had just said.

“At the moment, its use as a symbol would be much stronger than its use as a weapon.”

“If you say using it as a symbol, do you mean using it as the Divine Relic of the Church of Towan?”

“Yes.”

I had a rough idea of what Eleris was talking about.

“If it were to be discovered that my Lord is a demon, but also the master of Towan’s Divine Relic, Tiamata, then…”

"Then?"

“Then the Church of Towan has to choose between two things: Either deny that it is Tiamata, or admit that demons can also become Towan’s champion.”

I knew exactly what she meant.

The Church of Towan strictly followed the doctrine of purity, which rejected all undead races and demons.

That meant that demons, the demon king’s race, the archdemons, included, shouldn’t be able to become Tiamata’s, master.

However, a demon prince had actually managed to become Tiamata’s owner.

In that case they had to either state that my Tiamata was fake or that demons could become Towan’s champions as well.

“But as you may know, the high priests would be able to tell that it was the real Tiamata right away. Even if they aren’t the most faithful, they wouldn’t be able to deny that the sword’s power was the same.”

No matter what one did, one couldn’t cover the sky with one’s palm.

Denying that it was Tiamata or admitting that demons could become Towan’s champion…

Both were incredibly difficult for believers of Towan.

“The fact that your Highness is the owner of Tiamata would be a major issue that could shake all of the five great religions.”

“…I guess.”

“I’m not sure if the entire Church of Towan would be on your Highness’ side.

However, in cases like that, Tiamata would be a very powerful tool to gain political and religious protection."

Tiamata was an object that had a lot of other uses other than its use as a weapon.

If the worst-case scenario became reality, the Church of Towan might actually try to protect me if they found out that I was actually Tiamata's owner.

Of course, there was also a good chance that they would try to get rid of me.

Once Eleris informed me of Tiamata's other uses, she didn't seem to be too concerned about me becoming Tiamata's owner.

Of course, I didn't just go to her to report about Tiamata.

I had to earnestly start to prepare for the Gates incident from that point on.

As my main focus of preparation, I repeatedly trained and trained some more to make myself stronger.

Of course, that wouldn't be enough.

The Gates incident was basically a disaster.

—A disaster that no one was prepared for.

That was the reason why there weren't only enormous amounts of casualties, but also, because of the gigantic level of damage that couldn't be recovered from, they had called kids, who were still just students, even high-ranking Temple students, to arms.

I was the only one who knew about that disaster, no one in this world could predict it at that point.

If everyone could make some preparations in advance, we would be able to reduce casualties astronomically. The moment the Gates would occur, how it would happen, and the flow of events…

If they were able to know those kinds of things in advance, no matter if they were part of the Empire or some nobody, they would be able to prepare adequately.

There was no reason not to do it, after all.

Of course, just strengthening myself wouldn't be enough. If I were able to make use of more people, I would be able to do a lot more.

But how should I even explain and persuade people that I actually knew that an extraordinary and unprecedented large-scale disaster called the Appearance of Gates would happen in the future and that all of us had to prepare for it?

While it was true that the prince and princess who could move countless people were among my acquaintances, what should I do if they asked me how I knew about those Gates and was so confident that they would appear?

Even the fact that I was a demon prince would explain that.

So before doing anything else…

I had to get my hands on the best tool to gather people.

—Money.

I needed an astronomical amount of money to prepare for the Gate Disaster, not to control the Empire.

Money was just a means to my goal. I didn't know yet what to do with it or how much I would need, but once I made a lot of money, which was the basic requirement, I could earnestly start preparing for the future.

The first source was the Rotary Gang.

"How's Airi been doing recently?"

And the second was Airi, who solely lived for the purpose of making money itself, residing on the Edina Islands.

Eleris, Sarkegaar, Loyar, the Rotary Gang, the Thieves' Guild, and the connection I had

to the Prince and the Princess…

Airi on the Edina Islands and her close relationship with the local wealthy…

Influence and power in the Capital…

Money on the Edina Islands…

—I had to make thorough preparations for the Gates by means of those two things.

Eleris tilted her head at my question about Airi's situation.

"Well… According to my most recent information, things seem to have progressed quite a bit since the last time I checked."

"What do you mean by, 'progressed'?"

"Whether it's shipowners or loan sharks, it seems like she made quite a lot of acquaintances within the local populace. Rather than making more money, she is now able to move the people who are responsible for moving capital itself… Apparently, she has achieved what she intended to achieve."

Airi said that money was fine and good, but what she wanted was to control those that owned gigantic amounts of capital. I didn't really know how she did it, but it seemed like everything went as she expected anyway. Being able to control people who moved money wasn't much different from being rich yourself.

However, Eleris seemed a bit worried.

"We don't know how much money is needed to shake up the Empire, but the Princess might be able to place the Edina Islands under her complete influence if it continues like this."

I just suggested she do it on a whim, but Airi had actually managed to do a great job. Less than a year later, she now located in the Capital of the Edina Islands, where she had already established many connections to local wealthy and powerful people.

That was what Eleris was worried about.

She was worried that Airi might do so well that she might cause great chaos in the

actual human realm in the future.

“She makes a lot of money, so that’s all I need to know. Though they only move according to my words, if they actually do something like that, we can take our own actions then.”

“…Is that so?”

* * *

Eleris still seemed anxious, even after I assured her that they were under my complete control.

I would use Airi’s wealth in a slightly different manner than she intended. It couldn’t be helped that Eleris felt so anxious, but Airi doing well only had great merit for me. The more tools I could use, the better.

“How’s the Rotary Gang these days?”

“Oh, are you talking about that?”

The only topic missing was the Rotary Gang.

The headquarters, the new home for the Gang, had already been completed, and I knew that all of them were trying to escape from being beggars, posing as proper citizens.

After that bizarre incident of the Thieves’ Guild kidnapping me, Loyar continued to share the Gang’s progress with Eleris and Sarkegaar to prevent something like that from happening again.

In Airi’s case, things became kind of problematic because she did too well, but judging by how Eleris narrowed her eyebrows when I mentioned the Rotary Gang, there seemed to be a problem with them as well.

“Selling products is becoming harder and harder. There are just too many other competitors, so it seems like the mana train passengers are increasingly shunning them.”

It was getting harder and harder to do business on the trains.

Of course, I expected as much.

“I guessed as much. I never thought that this would be a long-running business anyway.”

“The gang members’ living standards are much better than before, so the amount of money they need to keep it up has increased as well. It seems like they have no idea how to run the gang, and it’s rather difficult to keep reaching out to the Thieves’ Guild as well.”

There were certain things one needed to live like a proper human. The living standards of the club members had improved, but the train business, which had become their support, was bringing in less and less income.

I was thinking that it was about time to implement a different revenue model. It was kind of weird calling it a revenue model.

Anyway, Loyar seemed to have a lot of worries.

Her head was about to explode because she suddenly had to take care of a lot more things after she had only ever lived a rough but simple life.

“How about this…?”

“What do you…?”

“We’ll do business legally.”

“…What?”

Eleris tilted her head as she heard the word “legal”.

“We’ll literally make peddling inside mana trains legal. It’s a good business, right?”

“…Are you going to borrow the power of the prince and princess?”

The sale of goods on the mana trains wasn’t illegal at the moment, but it would soon become illegal because it inconvenienced the passengers.

—But we could still make it legal.

It wasn't me who would be able to do that, but the prince or the princess could.

"Yeah, we won't just carry around stuff and sell them anymore like we're doing now, we'll do proper business."

At first, I thought about those kinds of businesses that sold snacks from carts they would drag around the trains, but that wouldn't get approved.

If someone were to move around a cart in a mana train, which didn't only have seats, that would be rather uncomfortable for the passengers. Sometimes the passengers had to stand to ride the train, after all.

"Every station the mana trains stop at is pretty much empty at the moment, they are just stations. Let's set up stores there and do proper business."

Every station simply served as a boarding platform. There were no stores or anything similar placed there.

Why were they teasing me like that when it was such a waste? After opening stores or something similar in those places, we would have to think about what to sell there. Stations were places with a huge amount of floating population, after all.

We had started with hawker trains, but we would move on to do completely legal business. Bertus or the princess certainly would give me their permission. It wasn't an unprofitable proposition, in the end, so their responses should be rather positive.

If they didn't, I could still think about what to do when the time came.

"…It certainly seems like a good idea. But… even if you get permission, wouldn't it cost a fortune to set up stands and shops in so many stations?"

We would have to set up more than a dozen stores. Even if we got permission, we'd end up as fools if we didn't even have enough money to set them up.

That woman, really…

"Who even starts a business with their own money? We can get an investment. There are a lot of places that would do something like that."

"…What?"

"The Imperial Government will give us exclusive business rights, and there are no other competitors besides us. Why would we use our own money to start it up? One has to use other peoples' money, of course."

Business was supposed to be done using other people's money!

If things worked out, we would be holding a monopoly over that business with the government's permission.

Monopoly…

Oh, what a beautiful word it was.

The Rotary Gang would have an exclusive contract with the government.

One would be crazy not to invest their money in our business. Eleris looked rather stunned. While she was very knowledgeable in the field of magic, she didn't know a thing about business.

You want to run a business without putting in your money?

Is that possible? Can we really do something like that?

That was what she seemed to be thinking.

Sometimes, Eleris was pretty cute as well.

"First, one place that will unconditionally sponsor us would be the Merchants Guild. They'll come running to us like starving dogs even if we only give them the rights to supply our goods."

"Yeah… I guess so."

Although the Merchants Guild didn't particularly like us as a group, they lived by the saying, "Don't hate the money, even if you hate the people." They should have a lot of money already, but if we decided to get all the goods to supply our Mana Train

Station Shops through the Merchant Guild, they'd faint from joy.

Besides investments, we would also be able to do something about the price of goods. If we asked them to compete in bidding for the supply rights internally, they would quickly turn to glare at each other before trying to crush each other. Merchants would ultimately try to compete with each other.

We would receive investments from the Merchants Guild while also being able to sell goods supplied by them.

In the end, the Merchants Guild would shoulder everything while the money went to the Rotary Gang. Of course, the Merchants Guild was sure to make huge profits as well.

The Rotary Gang would only have people and the monopoly to offer, but those two things alone were enough to make a lot of money.

Having that kind of power was just that good.

It was easier to make money with power than to buy power with money.

“Tell Loyar what we discussed here. I’ll go talk to Bertus and Charlotte.”

"Yes, Your Highness."

It would be good if they allowed us to do it, if they didn’t, we just had to think of another way.

Airi seemed to be doing well on her own, and if the plan worked, the amount of money the Rotary Gang would earn would be on a completely different level from whatever they had seen before.

Eleris seemed to be worried about a different matter next.

“But… Your Highness, can Loyar even handle a business of that size?”

“Hmmm. True.”

“She doesn’t have to worry much about running her Gang as it is now, but if she had to take charge of such a large business, I think things would end well.”

In Eleris’ mind, Loyar was hella stupid. I felt like it had gotten a bit better after she started managing some people, but she was originally a muscle brain.

Technically, she had a dog’s brain, though.

Eleris was worried that Loyar wasn’t capable enough to take charge of a project that size. I had to go to Temple, so I couldn’t do it.

“Eleris, are there any beggars that don’t have a story?”

“Huh?"

“Beggars and tramps are all people with stories, no matter how big or small they may be.”

“Y-yes… You’re right, but…”

Eleris tilted her head as if she thought something like, “What does that have to do with this topic?”

"We have more than 200 beggars in our rows holding many stories within them.”

A famous quote from one of Tolstoy’s novels, Anna Karenina, goes as follows:

All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

The Rotary Gang was one such unhappy family.

Each of them had to go through two hundred different kinds of misfortune.

"Among all those people, wouldn’t there be at least one person who’s done business for a long time and ended up getting betrayed or had it all blow up in their face?”

“Ah!"

There wouldn’t be just one or two among them who had lost money due to a failed business.

Loyar wouldn’t be alone in taking charge of that business—she could just proceed while getting advice from those kinds of people.

Eleris nodded wildly at my words, saying that it had to be like that.

* * *

After I gave Eleris some rough instructions, I went back to Temple.

I had to slowly proceed with the next step.

—The take-over of the Capital’s underworld.

I had to think about how to go about that as well.

I could either do it through the Thieves’ Guild, or I could do it differently and proceed with the Rotary Gang. However, I thought it would be better, for many reasons, to take the path through the Thieves’ Guild.

I wondered just what kinds of things I would get done with them.

If I could control the whole underworld, I might be able to destroy all the Warp Gates inside the Capital all at once.

Warp Gates…

That was the key point.

Two years from then, meaning the beginning of the first semester of my third year, all the Warp Gates on the whole continent would connect this world with another world, from which monsters would start to pour in.

—That was the Gate Incident.

I had to figure out a way to stop that incident at its source, or at least minimize the

damage it would cause if I couldn't stop it completely.

CHAPTER 198

The Gates Incident was such a disastrous event that I absolutely wanted to do something about it, but I didn't really know what. I finally had to pay the price for writing so many novels with tragic endings in which tons of people died.

A group of people was needed to prevent that dreadful situation or at least minimize the damage it would cause.

After all the Warp Gates were transformed into portals connecting to another world, travel using said Warp Gates would become completely impossible.

And the Capital had the largest amount of Warp Gates among all the cities on the continent.

As the capital owned the highest number of them, most people would die there as well, but ultimately, it was still the capital.

The Imperial Palace also had the largest group of combat forces, and Temple was located there, as well, so even if the damages were quite severe, the Imperial Capital itself was safe.

From that point on, they tried to destroy all the Warp Gates or somehow cut off their connection to the other world.

The Imperial Capital was the only place that was able to deal with the situation. With almost the entire continent thrown into chaos, leaving all territories that were part of the Empire completely disconnected from each other, only the Imperial Capital was unharmed.

After that, The Empire, with only the Capital remaining and Temple, began a long and exhausting fight to destroy the Warp Gates scattered across the continent or restore them to their original form.

I never really explained why the Gates just suddenly appeared.

They were just there all of a sudden—that was just how it was.

However, they added something called probability to this world.

There had to be some reason why the Warp Gates suddenly connected to a different world.

If I knew the reason, I could prevent the Gate disaster from happening.

That was probably the biggest punishment I received for writing the novel the way I did, skipping over explaining certain parts because it was just too bothersome.

I didn't explain the most important thing about the incident, so I had to find out how it would happen on my own, if I could even do that.

Was that what it was all about?

If I didn't find out, more than millions of people would die horrible deaths.

The conclusion of the Gate disaster was known, and yet its cause remained unknown.

My first idea was to just crush all the Warp Gates all over the whole continent.

However, that would be impossible.

I might be able to get rid of the Warp Gates in the Capital, but it was rather impossible for me to destroy all Warp Gates in every location. While I was busy traveling from place to place, they would just rebuild the Warp Gates.

To humans of this world, Warp Gates had become indispensable. If someone were to destroy them, of course they would retaliate against the ones who destroyed them, and they would just rebuild them.

In the original work, they gradually restored the Empire by destroying the Warp Gates and making them anew with magic.

If the Gates were destroyed or neutralized, those alien beings would no longer be able to come out of them.

Although the Capital was able to manage, ultimately, a lot of people still had to die.

As the Imperial Capital had the most Warp Gates, the place got invaded by the most monsters as well. The Capital had to suffer devastating blows.

If all the Warp Gates in the Imperial Capital got neutralized or destroyed before the Gate Disaster even happened, wouldn't that mean that no monsters would appear in the Capital?

It was impossible for me to destroy all the Gates on the continent, but if I limited my range to the Capital, wasn't that kind of possible?

Of course, I still didn't know the real cause of the incident.

Even if I destroyed all of the Gates, something similar might still end up happening.

So it would be best to find out the actual cause of the disaster and prevent it from happening to begin with.

The next best thing would be to break as many Warp Gates as possible before things went to shit. However, there was also a chance that breaking the Gates in advance wasn't a good idea. There was a possibility that something completely unexpected would happen.

Anyway…

First, I needed money and power.

I didn't think just telling Bertus and Charlotte that by the time we would start our third year, all the Warp Gates across the continent would suddenly connect to a different world, leading to shit hitting the fan, meaning that we had to destroy all of them before that would happen, would lead to anything.

If I wanted to go that way, I needed to have concrete proof. Proof that what I claimed was definitely going to happen. I didn't know whether I would be able to get something like that, but if I did, I could use it to persuade them.

Although there still seemed to be a lot of time until it would happen, there wasn't.

I needed powerful forces that could take care of things beyond my reach.

Money… People…

And power…

—I had to acquire all three of those things.

* * *

“…So you want to start stall businesses at the stations?”

“…Put simply, that’s what I’m planning on doing. Isn’t that okay?”

Bertus looked at me with a slightly puzzled expression.

The next step in my plan to prevent a catastrophic crisis equivalent to the destruction of the world was asking a certain someone to open businesses at the magic train stations.

?.

Just what is this…?

Bertus looked pretty bewildered at my sudden suggestion before showing me a sinister smile.

"Your income has become dangerously unstable because of all the competition these days, hasn’t it?”

"Well, yeah."

Bertus, of course, knew about the Rotary Gang and its source of income. I wasn’t really surprised about that. Quite the contrary, I was surprised that he let them be up to that point.

Bertus groaned as he nodded his head.

“It certainly does seem like I let areas with a high amount of floating population lie idle for far too long. It surely wouldn’t hurt to develop it a bit more."

Bertus seemed to look positively at my suggestion.

“There also have been talks of chasing out all the vendors from the trains, as there have been many complaints raised by the passengers of the magic trains…”

“…Is that so?”

In fact, that wasn’t the first time that the issue had been discussed.

At my question, Bertus simply nodded.

“That’s right. I had been blocking them from taking any actions up to this point, but it seems like I don’t have to do that anymore.”

"Huh? You blocked them?”

What did he mean? Blocked? Bertus’s lips began to twist, as he saw the surprise on my face.

“The precious family members of one of my classmates are forced to live on the streets… No, well, they had inhabited the back alleys since a long time ago. Anyway, you would have been in trouble if you didn’t have a source of income, am I right? So I just told them to leave you alone.”

‘What?’

I… I felt seriously touched at that moment. No, I wasn’t supposed to feel touched!

“It’s rather disturbing for you to make that kind of face. I’d prefer if you wore your slightly rotten expression as usual.”

“…What’s that supposed to mean?"

Bertus seemed kind of petrified as if my touched expression was repulsive to him.

It looked like Berts valued me a lot more than I thought, taking care of me in ways that I didn’t even notice.

Yeah.

Having a villain on your side was actually pretty good, wasn’t it? He might be a son of a bitch, but that son of a bitch was my ally!

"Anyway, you obviously want a monopoly on this, right? But even if you guys get exclusive business rights, you don't really have the capital to start these kinds of businesses, do you?"

Bertus was able to understand my greed but still asked if we were able to handle something like that.

"We'll get investments."

"Investments, I see. So you thought about that. In that case, from where?"

"For now, I was thinking the Merchants Guild."

"Hooh "

Bertus grinned as he looked at me.

"Were you secretly studying that field as well?"

"I don't know if it'll work out well, but I feel like it'll be successful."

It seemed strange to Bertus that I had come up with that kind of business plan and thought of a pretty plausible place to get investments.

I wasn't actually thinking about those types of things too thoroughly.

No, really, I really wasn't that kind of person. I had no idea how to run a proper business.

I just had the idea, and the ones who would run the actual operation would be some other guys.

There might be downsides to mixing other people into it, but there had to be someone in the Rotary Gang that had some business experience, and with all their experiences and expertise combined, they should be able to run the business decently.

I just needed to get permission.

"Alright. Nine to one."

“…What?”

‘What to how many now?’

What did he mean by that? Bertus furrowed his brows when I got stunned by his sudden mention of numbers.

“If you thought you could get something like that for free, wouldn’t that be rather unrealistic? Should I just take the nine? Do you want to take one as your income, then?”

"No! No! No! One! It’s a matter of course that I should at least give you a tenth. Of course! I should! Man, I’m so slow-witted! I hear that a lot!”

“I’m not going to invest separately, you know? Are you still going to give me a tenth?”

“Of course! My, oh my (Aigo, aigoo). I feel sorry that you are only taking that little!”

“Is that so? Should I take two tenths, then…?”

“Tha-that’s what I’m talking about, my friend! Hoho! Goodness! Goodness, gracious!”

Bertus was looking at me as if every word that came out of my mouth at that moment seemed funny to him.

* * *

Bertus said that he would regard my proposal quite positively, although he added that nine to one condition. It seemed like I would get notified when everything was decided later.

Anyway, it was quite shocking to find out that things worked out the way they did wasn’t because the government just didn’t bother with us but because Bertus had blocked any actions they would have taken.

Of course, it probably wasn’t that big an effort for him, just one word from him would have sufficed, probably. Well, it was better than nothing.

There was no deep reason behind why I went to Bertus with my proposal instead of to Charlotte.

Because of Dettomolian's shocking announcement the other day, I wasn't confident that I would be able to look at Charlotte's face properly.

I know we were just told that we would get married or something, but then I suddenly walked around the magic train station and thought of doing some commercial business there, so could you please give me permission to do so?

Doing something like that was out of the question!

I knew that I had nothing to worry about, but still.

Nothing to worry about.

Uhm.

Anyway, yeah!

In fact, after Dettomolian's world-shaking revelation, there had been a slight change in my relationship with Charlotte.

"Uhm, ah… Reinhardt."

"…Yes."

"Well, erm… Classes are over, aren't they?"

"Right."

"So… Erm. Yes. I'm leaving now."

"…Oh. Okay."

Things had become ridiculously awkward between us.

Before, when we ran into each other, Charlotte would always smile brightly and give me a friendly greeting, but after, she would only laugh awkwardly. We would smile and look at each other for a moment, but we would just end up passing by each other because we had no idea what to say.

Although we should've just assumed that the future Dettomolian saw was false, both of us seemed to have gotten quite confused trying to predict just how something like that would come to be.

I felt like I heard a prophecy that she would someday find out that I was Valier, which would lead to things taking a strange turn, and I had no idea how Charlotte was feeling about those things.

Anyway…

The weird result of those thoughts was that Charlotte and I became very awkward with each other because of the huge stone Dettomolian threw into the calm lake that was our relationship.

Ludwig, who was next to me and noticed that the atmosphere between Charlotte and me was a little strange, tilted his head.

"Did you two fight?"

"No, it's not like that."

It was Tuesday.

It was the day I had my swordsmanship classes, so I returned to the dormitory with Ellen after our classes.

Ludwig seemed to be worried that Charlotte and I had a fight when he saw us kind of avoiding each other.

"You both did a great job."

"Ah… yeah. Goodbye."

" Yes."

Scarlett bowed to me and Ellen before she returned to Class B's dormitory with Ludwig.

Scarlett didn't change in the way she did in the original, but that seemed fine in its own way. I could see that she was slowly changing.

I wished she would talk more comfortably. How long did she intend to continue being so overly respectful?

Nothing special happened in that day's swordsmanship class. We didn't hold another sparring match with the Orbis Class like the week before.

I sparred with Scarlett and Ludwig while Ellen watched us.

Without using my supernatural power, I lost to both of them.

While using my supernatural power, I had a slight advantage against Ludwig. On the other hand, I completely lost against Scarlett, thought it wasn't as overwhelming as before. I had already predicted how Scarlett's skills would develop, so in a way, it was an obvious result. While her potential wasn't as overwhelming as Ellen's, she was incredibly strong as well. She would play a big role during the Gate Incident.

She was nicknamed Spellbreaker due to her powerful anti-magic ability that could almost be called magic immunity.

Scarlett also had quite a fast growth rate, and Ludwig was the main character, so if I let my guard down even a little, the gap between me and Scarlett would only widen, or Ludwig would soon catch up to me.

Ludwig would probably catch up to me first. He was the main character, after all.

And Ellen was able to defeat all of us without even using her magic power. Overwhelmingly so.

In other words, we were able to measure our own combat capabilities.

Normally:

Ellen>Scarlett>>>>>Ludwig>Me when I'm at my best.

Ellen (Using Magic Body Strengthening)>>>>>>>Scarlett>Me (Using my Supernatural Power)>Ludwig

That was how it was. I wasn't sure how much stronger I was with Tiamata, so I couldn't really consider it properly.

Then there were those who had combat talents and trained, to add to it, which were Bertus, Cliffman, Erich, and Delphine. However, Delphine wasn't technically a close-quarter combat-type fighter, as her talent lay in archery.

It was more than obvious that Cliffman and Bertus would also be much better than me in combat.

I sometimes felt Cliffman's power on my own body during our spars, and while I hadn't actually faced Bertus in a spar, he was similar to Cliffman in strength, or even stronger.

So what I was trying to say was that, in my state, I could only definitely win against Erich and Ludwig among Royal Class' students with close-quarter combat talents.

A bastard who didn't put much effort into his training and the late blooming main character…

What's more, I had to use my supernatural power to win against them.

Although I had grown to a point that I couldn't compare myself to how I was in the past, I was still very lacking.

I headed to Class A's dormitory together with Ellen.

As we were walking back to the dorm, the scene that unfolded before my eyes seemed like I experienced a deja vu of what happened the previous week.

-Hey, why don't we just tell a teacher?

-Ah… I don't know… that dog bastard.

Those three idiot brothers sat there just like before.

Erich de Lafaeri, who had been beaten up by the Orbis Class, was again surrounded by Konno Lint and Cayer, his cheeks swollen.

Before, he provoked someone from the Orbis Class, saying that he would just end up beating him later anyway because they didn't have any talents.

So I had told them not to pick any fights with them, which was when Harriet, who thought that I hit Erich, entered and started nagging me.

"Hey, go ahead first."

"Yes."

Ellen walked towards her room at my words while I headed to those guys. As I approached them, I could already clearly see that they were more than fed up.

"Hey, what did you do this time to get beaten up?"

It probably was the same pattern as before.

They had probably picked a fight with the Orbis Class and ended up getting beat up, returned to the Royal Class' dorm, and would end up getting nagged by me again.

Erich frowned and shook his head.

"No, that's not how things happened this time, okay?!"

"…It wasn't?"

"Y-yeah! I didn't do anything this time! A-are you going to tell me that I'm a crazy idiot again?"

He said that he didn't do anything that time, so it wasn't him who started the fight, that was why he yelled at me as if to tell me not to nag him.

"…Oh, is that so? Why are you yelling at me like that then, huh?"

How dare he yell at me with his eyes wide open?

"Ah, th-that's not…"

Erich shut his mouth when I rather quickly approached him. I sat on the sofa across from him and folded my arms.

“What was it this time?”

If Erich told the truth… Did he actually get hit, even though he didn’t do anything? Before, he was in the wrong, but things were different that time, weren’t they?

“Hey! I told you to cut it out!”

And I had another moment of deja vu.

I could hear Harriet's voice echoing from behind me.

“You’re bullying the others again!”

Perhaps just having returned from her classes, Harriet looked at me with her eyes wide open.

‘No!’

Why was she actually doing that to me?

“No! Hey! I didn’t do anything last time and this time as well! I explained everything to you! Do you think I’ll just go beat up some kids when I get bored? I wouldn’t! It has been a while since I actually did something like that! Why do you keep doing this to me?”

Seriously, the last time I hit one of my classmates was when Heinrich said that he wanted to fight me, so I had punched him lightly! And we had honestly mutually agreed to that! If we went further back, then back when we were on the deserted island, I had hit Erich after he got more or less slaughtered by Scarlett when he bothered her and then tried to whine to me!

That had been so long ago!

Her expression changed slightly when she noticed that I was actually getting upset.

“Ah… Really?"

The corners of her mouth twitched strangely.

What?

That girl, did she think it was funny that I found her treatment unfair?

She was usually the one who would always get teased, but it looked like she knew the taste of teasing someone else.

It was as if she finally got a taste of sweet revenge.

Come to think of it…

Why are you doing this to me! Why are you doing this to me!

That was the phrase Harriet would always say when I teased her.

I was saying it that time around.

“Isn’t it obvious what a bastard like you, who only knows how to bully and beat up others, is doing right now? Don’t lie. It definitely was you.”

“No! I didn’t do anything last time and I didn’t do anything right now, okay? I know that the sins I have committed are endless, but I’m telling the truth!”

No fucking way!

She had figured out how to beat me at my own game!

While Harriet and I were bickering, Erich de Lafaeri’s expression grew more and more deadly pale.

He had come back to vent his anger, but in the end, he had just turned into a punching bag again.

In the end, Erich endured the shame and explained to Harriet that it wasn’t me who beat him up. I felt kind of sorry for him.

No, but I really didn’t hit him. I wasn’t lying.

“By the Orbis Class? Again?”

“Urg…”

Harriet’s pointed remarks made him contort his expression, but it seemed like he really got beat up by some Orbis Class guy. It seemed that it was also the guy who beat him up last time.

With my arms folded, I asked him something.

“What happened this time?”

Although it was rather difficult to trust Erich’s words, he said that he didn’t pick a fight with them like last time.

"No… I didn’t do anything this time… But after class… He hit my shoulder… all of a sudden…”

It seemed like Eruch was terribly embarrassed to explain the truth to Harriet and me. Cayer and Kono Linz were also looking at Erich with pity as he was explaining.

Harriet frowned.

“So, you’re saying that, last week, it was your fault that you got beat up, but this time, they just hit you for no reason whatsoever?”

“…”

Apparently, Erich was deeply hated by that Orbis Class guy who was attending his Class. So after class, the guy just punched his shoulder and picked a fight with him.

It certainly seemed like quite an unfair situation. I also understood Kono Lint for suggesting to go tell a teacher about it.

However, it looked like that bastard’s way to judge people was very twisted. It was true that Erich crossed the line the week before, but to go and pick a fight with him a week later…

“That guy sure is weird. Why did he beat you up even though you didn’t do anything?”

Harriet mumbled quietly while frowning.

She seemed to act a bit different from usual. The week before, as well, when she was nagging me, saying that she didn't want to see me bully others anymore.

What should I say?

Had she actually evolved into a class president kind of character?

'No, I absolutely hate that trope. I hate it as much as Ludwig's cheerful, bubbly, righteous character.'

Harriet looked at me. Just looking at her expression, she seemed majorly grumpy.

"What… What?"

"Aren't you angry?"

"…Huh?"

No, why should I be angry? I wasn't even the one who got hit. Did she mean that I should be angry as a fellow classmate of the Royal Class?

I didn't have that kind of sense of belonging, though?

What did she want from a demon prince who didn't even have any sense of duty towards the demon realm?

What an idiot.

That was all I thought about that situation.

"That's strange. I thought you would immediately take off to beat that guy up."

"Why the fuck would I do something like that?"

"That's the person you are, after all."

"Not at all!"

Not only Harriet, but Cayer and Kono Lint were also looking at me like that.

'Show us something! Reinhardt! You're the hands-on kind of guy, after all! You didn't even mind beating up our seniors either!'

I could read their thoughts quite clearly.

What was with their eyes that seemed as if they wanted me to do something? They looked like they were hoping that I would go cause some trouble like usual, right?

It seemed like they wanted to direct my troublemaking towards the Orbis Class.

Those expressions dripped with their desire for revenge.

Please cause trouble for them! Avenge us!

…What the fuck?

Was that, in a way, also a type of trust they had in me?

"Idiot. If you feel wronged, then you should just go tell a teacher, or train harder so that you can get your own revenge just a day faster. What do you want me to do?"

"I-I didn't say anything!"

Oh, right.

He hadn't said anything…

Erich seemed to feel more and more wronged.

Harriet murmured softly with a pouting look on her face.

"I know that the Orbis Class doesn't like us, but aren't they a little too much…? They did something to me as well."

"…What? To you?"

Harriet didn't just suddenly turn into a class president type of character.

She was already pretty pissed off because she had been beaten by the Orbis Class, but when she heard that they beat up another classmate as well, she got even angrier.

But Harriet actually got beaten by someone?

“Yes, in today’s Practical Destructive Magic Class, someone set off some lightning magic near me. They said it was a mistake, but… I think they actually meant to do that. Well, he got a demerit, though.”

“…Huuh.”

I felt something snap inside of me.

"Those… fucking bastards."

I felt my patience completely snapping.

CHAPTER 199

“Wh-where are you going?!”

“Let go, I’m going to fucking crush all of them.”

“I’m fine! I’m fine, okay? I’m not even hurt!”

“No, that bastard can’t just get away with fucking with you. How could he cast a destruction magic spell close to others? That fucker has to get beaten up to fucking learn his lesson.”

Harriet immediately grabbed the hem of my shirt and held me back before I could run out of the dormitory. It seemed like she was rather shocked because she thought I would cause a major commotion.

The three idiot brothers immediately ran away as soon as they noticed that my judgment was seriously twisted, saying that it was bullshit.

“I told you he already got a demerit, and he got reprimanded and told that he shouldn’t do something like that again! That guy won’t do something like that again in the future, so you don’t have to be so worried!”

Eventually, after arguing for a while, I gave up. Harriet told me to calm down and dragged me to the tea terrace, sitting me down.

“I seriously can’t tell you anything… It really wasn’t that dangerous a spell, even if it actually hit, I would’ve been alright.”

“It still was hella reckless, dangerous, and—what’s more important—it was done on purpose.”

No matter how mischievous one might be, how could they target spots close to people with their magic during magic lessons and just call it a mistake? Just what the fuck was wrong with that bastard's head?

Harriet kept staring at me nervously as I got more worked up.

She seemed to be worried that I just might break into the Orbis Class' dormitory while she wasn't looking.

She told me to calm down and even poured me a cup of tea, which was rather unusual.

"Although I'm curious if we would get the reaction we wanted, but I'm also quite scared of what might happen. I can't predict what you're going to do, after all."

"…Huh? I didn't really cause that much trouble, though?"

The corners of Harriet's mouth twitched, her expression a puzzled one, at my small protest.

"It's only the beginning of the second semester of our first year, and you don't think that having caused that much trouble already is problematic…?"

"…Right."

The others were living a quiet life without causing any trouble, so it was already quite ridiculous to say that I didn't cause that much trouble when I did what I did.

"And when Erich said that he got hit, you didn't really care, but why are you so angry when I didn't even get hit?"

"That's…"

Well…

Just when I was about to say something, I was tongue-tied. What should I say?

I had a really bad impression of that guy Erich, so I didn't really care whether he got hit or not. Of course, I was the one who set that punk to behave the way he did, so even if I didn't like what he did, I would just be shooting myself in the foot.

Harriet slightly raised her face.

It seemed like she was somewhat happy that I got angry on her behalf after all.

"…You're a friend."

That was all I had to say.

"…And Erich isn't?"

"Why would I be friends with that guy?"

Yeah, it's true, so to speak, that I snapped in the end. It wasn't the action, but who they did it to that mattered.

"Friend…"

Harriet seemed to let the word roll in her mouth.

She didn't look disappointed or sad, rather, she seemed relieved and somewhat happy.

She was showing me an expression I had never seen on her face before.

"…"

Then Ellen, wearing her training suit, went up to the tea terrace and met my eyes. Since it wasn't really a public place, it seemed like she probably went all the way there looking for me.

Did she really go there just to ask me to go to the training room with her?

However, she just looked at me and Harriet for a moment before she turned around without saying a word.

Was she not looking for me?

"Anyway, don't cause any trouble because of me. I can take care of my own problems."

"Alright, I got it."

Harriet was sitting in a position where she couldn't see Ellen, so she just nagged me for a while and told me not to get into any trouble and behave.

Finally, after giving me a long lecture Harriet sighed and sipped her tea.

I did have some business with Harriet, actually.

“Hey, you know what? Don’t you want to make something like that?”

“Make something? Like what?”

Harriet tilted her head at my question.

"Like a club."

“…A club?”

Harriet looked surprised as if she was wondering why I was mentioning clubs all of a sudden.

“You research magic.”

“Right.”

“Mostly with Adelia. Right?”

“Yeah, but what does that have to do with clubs?”

Harriet seemed a little impatient, as if telling me that I should quickly get to the point.

Just like Ellen, Cliffman, and I practically lived in the training room, Harriet would often stay locked up in the magic lab unless something out of the norm happened. Adelia was the same.

While she didn’t think so, she was one heck of a nerd—for magic only.

“Wouldn’t it be nice if you got together with others more often?”

“Got together?”

That school building wasn’t a club building.

However, as my novel had become reality, there was no law that would forbid us from doing something like that. Of course, I had no intention of joining any club,

though I did have some connection with the religious club ‘Grace’, but they wouldn’t limit me.

Just like Ellen had become stronger earlier than she had in the original, I hoped that the others would also become stronger than they were in the novel.

Ludwig was the only case where it would be best to just leave him alone.

Harriet worked hard just short of me, but there was no reason why I couldn’t show her a slightly better way of doing things.

"For example, if you got together with the wizard majors from Class B and created a Magic Research Club, wouldn’t it be nice to talk with them about magic and get to know some spells that you might not have known of? You’re not limited to any particular field of magic, right?”

“That’s right, but… With students from Class B?”

“Yes.”

“Well… I’m not sure about the Magic Research Society of Royal Class, but I do know the clubs that are out there. However, the standard of discussions and research at a student’s level couldn’t be higher than just consulting a teacher. That’s why I don’t go to places like that…”

Harriet seemed to have reasons as to why she hadn’t joined any magic research clubs on her own. She seemed to think that research subjects students could cover weren't at a high enough level for her.

* * *

However, that reaction alone could be called a success.

In the original, just mentioning doing research with the inferior B Class students would have disgusted Harriet.

However, Harriet’s personality was completely different at the moment.

Her attitude was more like, “What good would come from joining a club where just some students gathered together”, not, “Why with students from Class B?”

She didn't hate the idea, she just didn't understand why she would do something like that. That was how much she changed.

"No. I'm sure it'll be of help to you."

"…Why do you think so?"

There were two students with magic talents in Class B.

Christina, who had talents in Alchemy and Enchantment.

And Anna de Gerna, who had a talent in Black Magic.

Both of them also had very strong talents in their own right and would become forces to be reckoned with during the Gate Incident.

However, it wasn't those two who had magic-related talents that would help Harriet grow further.

"That guy called Louis Ancton from Class B would be a great help to you."

"What… That guy? But he isn't a wizard, right?"

Harriet wasn't really interested in Class B, but she obviously knew who was who. That was why she also knew about Louis Ancton's talent.

"You do research on magic."

"Yes, I know…"

Louis Ancton had an 'academic' talent. He was just smart.

Although he couldn't use magic, he was walking down the path of a wizard who would only study magic as a science. He was outstanding in the theory of it, but couldn't put it into practice.

Class B's Cristina and Anna de Gerna would often take Louis Ancton's advice to further their magic later on.

After acting all prickly, he would start to grow closer to his classmates after a while.

He was like a growth potion when it came to kids with magical talents.

If it were the original novel, Harriet would absolutely hate the idea, but her personality had become very soft compared to the past, so I told her that, thinking she would accept.

If they studied with Louis Ancton, both Harriet and Adelia, as well as the Class B kids, would benefit from it.

Of course, it seemed a bit heavy-handed that I had already finalized the plan in my head without asking the concerned party what his intentions were even once.

They wouldn't just do it for one or two days. I was sure, though, that all of them would have a good time.

Harriet seemed to think about it.

"Hmmm… I'm not really sure."

"Then you could just get together and have a chat. If you think it'll be helpful for you, then do it, if you don't think so, then don't."

"…If it's like that, I could give it a try."

Harriet nodded, saying that she could try if it was just that much.

Alright.

I just had to carefully lay one paving stone after the other to create our road to the future.

I wasn't sure how much they would be able to achieve together, but I could at least suggest some research projects, including the possibility that the Warp Gates could connect us to a different world.

It would be great if they could figure out the cause behind it, but it also didn't really matter if they didn't.

They might also end up making things that would have taken much longer to develop.

It also rang true that their achievements in the field of magic would increase tremendously just by meeting and acting together.

Louis Ancton, who wasn't a wizard but knew a lot about magic, could help all of them achieve something greater.

That was the picture I was painting in my mind, but then Harriet asked me something, her face a little flushed.

"B-by the way, you… Why would you be interested in something like magic research? Y-you… You have a supernatural power, right? If you joined a club like that with me… You probably would be really bored… Will you be okay?"

Huh? What did she mean?

"Me? Why would I do something like that?"

"'…Huh?"

I mean, I was just suggesting that the kids who were really knowledgeable should get together twice or thrice a week and discuss and research magic together, I wasn't saying that I would join them, was I?

Harriet looked a little puzzled by my words.

"Y-you won't join?"

"No, of course not. I'm not a wizard, and I don't even know a single thing about magic. What could I even do to help you?"

Harriet seemed to have gleaned, "Let's make a research club together!" from my words.

No, come to think of it, it was only natural that she thought I meant that. Otherwise, I wouldn't have a reason to say things like, " Let's get some kids together and create a club!"

So Harriet thinking that my idea was to create a magical research group together with her was probably more natural than I thought.

However, it was still rather obvious.

When Harriet realized her mistake, her face got redder and redder.

I reached my limit!

"Did you want to be in a club with me?"

'H-huh? Wh-what?"

As I poked at her with a smirk on my face, Harriet's face seemed to grow hotter.

"Why do you want me to be there?"

"Wh-what?! I… I… What do you mean? Ha, haha! Why would I want to start that kind of club with you, who doesn't even know the basics of magic? I… I thought you meant that because you put it like that! So what could you even do when you joined something like that? That's what I meant! Even if you wanted to join, I'd reject you! It's not like I wanted to create it with you or something. I don't! And I never will!"

As soon as I poked at her, Harriet flew into a rage and rapidly fired words, just as I expected. Seeing Harriet so angry after some time, I felt refreshed as if a ten-year congestion was finally going down.

"No, if you don't want me there, then just ignore me. Why are you getting so angry? You're even wearing the earrings I gave you. You know, it's kind of unhealthy to have such severe mood swings all the time."

"Aah! Seriously, why are you doing this to me? I mean, just be nice or be mean, just pick one! H-hmpf!"

"H-hey. Hey. Girl, p-put that down. You're not supposed to throw these things. Ah."

"I'm going to throw it! I'm really going to throw it, no matter what you say!"

Harriet had lifted up a teapot containing hot tea and glared at me as if she was about to throw it at me any time.

The hands holding the teapot shook, and she eventually put it down without throwing it. Of course, she was still huffing and puffing.

I didn't know if that was a good or bad thing because she ended up overplaying her embarrassment with extreme anger.

Of course, even though I wouldn't sign up for the club, that didn't mean I would leave all the work to Harriet.

"You're not that close to the students of Class B, right?"

"…I just know what they look like. We don't even greet each other."

Harriet had become very close to Class A's girls, but she still treated the boys of her class like before except for me. Not to mention the students from Class B.

"I won't join, but I'll try to convince the Class B kids. I don't want you to do everything yourself."

"…You are?"

Harriet seemed surprised that I would go so far.

"Yeah, as you said, I'm just an outsider who doesn't even know the basics of magic, but I'm quite the bastard, so I'm very confident that I'll be able to make some people gather up, even if they don't want to."

"Are you saying that you'll just drag them here by force if one of them doesn't want to come?"

"No, do you really think I would do something like that?"

"I really think you would, though? You thug."

"No… Girl, I was just kidding."

Harriet also had a means to tease me, as did I, so she immediately targeted that spot as soon as she saw a chance.

"Anyway, I'm quite good with words, so I should be able to convince them to gather

up. The rest would be up to you and the other kids."

For the common goal of improving their skills in magic, the magic majors of both Royal Class A and B would be working together.

Originally, Class B would be the only one that'd do something like that, and that would only include Class A a lot later.

I was just making it happen ahead of time.

Just as Ellen had learned how to strengthen her body with magical power in advance, I could also make Harriet become a much more powerful wizard earlier.

Harriet seemed to have let go of some of her worries when she heard that I would be in charge of gathering people for the time being.

However, Harriet was still pouting.

"…Hey."

"What? Do you have something more to say?"

"If you really want to work together to make the club, I could let you in."

"…Huh?"

"What?! Even though I really hate the idea, if you really want to or something, I could at least let you join!"

What was she talking about? I didn't even intend to join in the first place, and I had no clue about magic, so it would be meaningless for me to join.

So what did she mean by, "If you want me to, I could let you join?"

While I was thinking about that, I couldn't help but notice the pained look in Harriet's eyes. Her expression looked the same as before, but her eyes didn't.

'This… '

She was asking me to create the club with her.

Then she should've just asked me to do that. Did she not want to ask me that first, so she made it as if I really wanted to join?

Requesting something like that sure fit her quite well.

Her worries didn't last long.

"Sure, I guess there should be at least one person in charge of chores and odd jobs."

I didn't know a single thing about magic, so I wasn't sure what I would be doing in a Magic Research Society, but I was sure there would be some tasks I could do.

To be exact, it didn't really matter.

If I said no there, I could predict what kind of expression she would make.

I didn't want to see her look like that.

"Then let's do our best together."

"Hmpf, it can't be helped then."

Did she notice that her expression and tone didn't match at all?

I had never seen her smile so brightly before.

CHAPTER 200

In my first semester, it was already hard enough to look out for myself, so I couldn't afford to worry about anything or anyone else. I'd been put in a situation where it was unclear whether I would be able to even take care of my own safety first.

Of course, after starting my second semester, while I hadn't gained enough strength to ensure my safety, I had become a lot stronger.

However, for a time, my routine had pretty much stabilized.

Because my personal training and performance routine was stable, I could focus on other things as well.

Airi's business, the new business plan for the Rotary Gang…

And even promoting the growth of the main story's characters.

I had to keep working on myself while also making progress in the other fields.

First…

While it had not been decided yet if it would be a magic research circle, a magic research society, or a magic research club, it was clear that I had to talk to each student of Class B one by one, so I planned on visiting them after classes were over.

* * *

The next day. Wednesday.

Dawn…

I did my early morning training with Adriana. Of course, compared to Adriana, my stats were still a lot lower, but I didn't fall behind anymore.

I couldn't do any morning training the previous two days because of the Tiamata incident, but Adriana seemed to have kept doing the training alone during that time.

When she asked me what happened, I said that I had simply overslept.

I did wonder how Adriana would react if she knew that I had become the Holy Sword Tiamata's master. It was the divine Relic of the goddess Towan whom she served, after all.

I was pretty sure she would be surprised. Of course, that didn't mean I would tell her. Adriana had a weak heart, after all.

"Phew…"

After one set, Adriana and I rested on the bench on the hill.

"Summer is almost over."

"You're right."

By October, the summer heat would have left, making room for Fall to take over. And after a short Fall, Winter would be upon us. Adriana looked at Temple's landscape stretched out before the hill.

"During winter, the view from this place is really nice, you know?"

"Really?"

"Yes."

Adriana had lived a year longer in Temple than I had, so it was no wonder that she knew the scenery one could see in Temple during the winter. She guaranteed that Temple looked amazing in the snow.

"So does that mean that you'll do your morning training during that kind of weather as well? What if you slip and hurt yourself?"

"Did you forget this?"

Adriana smiled as she showed me her hands emitting divine power.

Even if she got hurt, she would be able to recover with that, so it didn't really matter if it snowed or not. That only made that girl seem even more clumsy.

“By the way, have you ever gotten into a fight with the Orbis Class?”

There had been some incidents the day before, so I was a little curious.

The incident taking place between the Orbis Class and Ludwig was scheduled to happen during the school festival, but we were already getting entangled with the Orbis Class because of trivial things.

Did Adriana, who had been in that place for one year longer than me, ever have a fight with the Orbis Class?

“The Orbis Class? Why? Did you get in trouble with the Orbis Class?”

As if wondering what she should do with that personality of mine, Adriana distanced herself from me while looking slightly tired.

No! Seriously!

I knew that I had accumulated a lot of karma, but no matter what I said, people would always connect me with the image of a troublemaker!

“No. I never got into a fight with them, and I only sparred and practiced with them in a normal way a few times.”

Of course, I’d overdone it a little, but I didn’t tell her that because she would only feel disappointed in me if I did.

Right…

Come to think of it, I never picked a fight with them, but they did, right? If you were asking me, they were the ones who asked for it, right? And because I’d won, they didn’t come to me to cause trouble afterwards, either.

Adriana nodded at my words.

“Hmm, the Orbis Class isn’t really fond of us. A lot of our kids also don’t really like the Orbis Class kids either. Art, for example, has been in a few fights with them.”

Art de Gartis, the second-years’ A-3. He was the one I was supposed to have a duel with. Of course, I’d actually ended up fighting the third-year, Mayarton.

I hadn't seen that dude ever since that duel. I only knew that his reputation had completely fallen to rock bottom within the Royal Class because he'd tried to punish a first-year through a duel.

Anyway, it seemed that the second-years, who attended Temple longer than us, had problems with the Orbis Class as well.

"How did the fights go? Did he win?"

"Well, they would be about equal. The students of Orbis Class are really hard-working, after all. Of course, that's just because I stopped the fights before they became too heated."

I didn't know how strong Art de Gartis actually was, but it seemed to be rather difficult to tell whether he or the Orbis Class students were superior in their fights. Adriana sighed as she took a sip of water from her canteen.

"It's understandable. We're talented, and there are a lot of kids in the Orbis Class who really think that we would just get strong without having to put in any effort."

There were some students that only relied on their talent and nothing else, but there were also students like Adriana who continued to train hard, so the dislike the Orbis Class held for the Royal Class was rather twisted.

"Worst of all, the Orbis Class is pretty much forcing its students to hate the Royal Class. Teachers and seniors alike. They tell them things like, 'Do your best if you don't want to lose to those bastards'…"

The Orbis Class had deliberately stimulated the student's inferiority complex towards the Royal Class to make them work harder. 'You guys don't have any talents, so do you think you can afford to be lazy? How are you going to deal with the Royal Class if you don't work harder?' Something like that.

I heard it was almost as if they were in the military.

Adriana knew that there were some of her classmates who hated the Orbis Class, but she had no particular opinion about them. She seemed to worry more about structural issues.

"So you don't like or dislike them?"

“Well, that’s how it is. It’s not like nothing happened.”

Adriana wore a slightly awkward smile as we talked about that topic.

“Something happened?”

“Huh? Ah… Yes. We didn’t get into a fight. The matter was… quite difficult.”

“What happened?"

At my question, Adriana scratched her cheek slightly, wearing a somewhat bewildered expression.

“Well… One of the Orbis Class kids… had been following me for quite a while…”

“Follow you? For what re—Ah. No way.”

Adriana’s slightly flustered look made me realize what had been going on.

“Did some guy fall in love with you at first sight or something?”

“…Y-yeah…”

Adraina nodded her head slightly, her face red.

Certainly, it wasn’t really that strange or surprising that something like that happened.

"Well, even when I told him that I was planning on becoming a Paladin of the Church of Towan, he didn’t give up… that guy was kind of troublesome.”

Since she was going to be a Priest of Towan, she couldn’t accept his heart, no matter how much he liked her. She’d told him that many times, and yet he was still unable to understand her words.

It seemed like Adriana hadn’t gotten into a fight with them, but she’d still had some trouble with them.

“Things are probably really difficult for you, too. If anything happens, then tell me…”

This didn't only apply to the Orbis Class, Adriana was in a position where she couldn't accept anyone's love, even if she liked them.

"Uhm… that might be a bit troublesome. So… While I do think of you as a friend, I want us to be a bit more cautious because others might think otherwise."

Adriana was just reasonably comfortable with people of the opposite sex, but other people might believe that it was something more, so it seemed like I had unknowingly caused her harm. Her expression darkened slightly.

Adriana stretched her body.

"Urg… I just feel relaxed around you, junior. You don't seem like someone who has that kind of interest in me."

"You can tell?"

"Of course, it's obvious."

Adriana smiled at me.

I'd thought she was just nice and pleasant to everyone, but that was the first time I realized that she was actually quite the careful person in regards to those kinds of things.

Was it because I hadn't been showing any signs that I was trying to get closer to her more than we already were?

Adriana smiled, seeming lonely as she was fiddling with her canteen.

"If someone I thought of as a precious friend tried to be more than just that… What should I do in that situation…?"

She wouldn't be able to accept their love.

A situation in which she just wanted to stay as friends while the other party didn't.

It seemed like Adriana found herself in that kind of situation at the moment.

"Pretending to not notice their feelings… would be bad, right?"

That seemed to be a separate matter from what happened with the Orbis Class.

Someone liked her, but that person was a very precious friend to Adriana. They couldn't be anything more than friends, and she also didn't want them to be anything else.

However, Adriana seemed unable to decide whether it would be right to pretend that she didn't notice the other person's feelings or not.

"That would be bad indeed."

I answered curtly before I took a sip from the canteen as well.

Did I really mean those words that I spoke to Adriana?

I didn't know.

* * *

There's a saying that even ten bodies aren't enough to get everything done.

It meant that one was just that busy.

To be honest, I didn't even need ten.

I wished I had just three, no more or less.

One placed at the Rotary Gang, one located in Temple, and one for my private life.

Spending some personal time was necessary because, in the end, my human relations within Temple were very important as well, so I couldn't just neglect them. I didn't know if I could solve everything with my own strength alone. However, nothing like that was possible.

Of course, splitting myself into three was impossible, even with 'Additional Settings', so I had to do everything myself.

I had to live such a damn hard life, even though no one asked me to.

No, but honestly, if someone actually asked me to do all that, I don't think I would

work as hard as I was.

I entered the dormitory of Class B because of my work for the Magic Research club. Harriet and Adelia were the only ones with magic majors in Class A. I wasn't in charge of persuading Adelia because that was Harriet's job.

What I planned on doing was talking to the two students with magic majors from Class B and number B-2, Louis Ancton.

Louis Ancton once helped me to prepare for the midterm exams in our first semester, though I'd half-forced him.

"Hey, it's been a while, right?"

"Uhm, Ah… Reinhardt. Ehm, yes…"

Louis Ancton, that nerd, still stiffened when he saw me. Honestly, I had never done anything to him. I had just asked him to study together, and I hadn't said anything harsh to him or tried to blackmail him.

"I'm going to make you an amazing offer."

"…Huh?"

"So come to the magic lab. Bring Anna and Christina as well."

"Huuuh?"

Damn it. Although I didn't really bother him, who'd like a guy who talked to people in such a commanding tone?

Well…

To be honest, it was a lot easier to just act like that than to give detailed explanations every time. When I said, "Hey! Give that to me!" they'd just give it, and when I said, "Hey! Do this!" they'd just do it.

It was very comfortable…

It seemed like I had already long passed the point of no return.

I just couldn't help it anymore…

* * *

There were two students with magic majors in Class B:

B-5, Christina, who had a talent in Alchemy and Enchantment.

B-6. Anne de Gerna, who had a talent in Black Magic.

Then there was B-2. Louis Ancton, who didn't have a magic-related talent but studied it.

Enchantment was a very expensive field of magic, as I heard from Harriet. It was a magic system that wouldn't be taught easily and whose methods were strictly guarded.

However, that didn't mean that it was a rare type of magic or that it was a higher-ranking magic system.

A-7 Adelia had talents in summoning and magic crafting. While enchanting was merely used to enchant objects, magic crafting was used to create machines powered by magic. A typical example would be the mana train or the warp gates.

Magic crafting was a higher-level magic system that couldn't even be compared to the field of enchantment.

Of course, Harriet, who had a talent for magic in and of itself, held the absolute best talent among all magic-related talents.

So, what was unique about No. 6 Anna de Gerna?

Her talent was black magic.

While it was quite the insidious and evil type of magic, there were black magicians among the teachers in Temple. Not every part of black magic was used to curse

others after all. They were simply studying the field of magic and science called black magic.

“So. Erm… I bought them.”

“Oh, well done. You did a great job, man.”

“…”

Anyway, Louis Ancton went to Class B’s magic lab with the other two, just as I told him. I could see Louis’ expression slightly stiffen when I told him he did well.

It seemed like he felt slightly humiliated, totally being treated like my henchman like that. No, but I really just meant that he did a great job, though.

While they both had seen my face before, we hadn’t spoken with each other.

Neither of them had any idea for what reason I called them there, so they were rather curious as well as bewildered, each in their own way.

However, the most important thing was that they came, even though it was some guy that they weren’t even close to who’d called them.

In the end, I was still of the opinion that first impressions were very important. I hadn’t done anything like that before ever since I’d acted like a rabid dog in our first semester.

After the second semester had begun, I’d stayed quiet, except for that time where I sparred with a student from the Orbis Class during my Swordsmanship Classes. Of course, there were still rumors about my unusual actions in the Darklands floating about.

However, that was vastly different from acting like a scumbag.

Anyway, both of them came when I said that I was looking for them, and I don’t know what I would have done if they hadn’t.

Christina wore a pair of glasses on her nose and had her orange hair tied in braids. She was wearing a white robe, which looked similar to the gown worn by doctors, with various stains on it. Some of them could be presumed to come from drug

ingredients, and others appeared to be dirt.

It was quite well known that her clothes would always appear like that because she frequently dealt with alchemical reagents as well as plants and herbs.

Anna de Gerna didn't give off the same gloomy feeling as Dettomolian that made me want to ask if he was okay. Her eyes just seemed somewhat hollow all the time. She had black hair, black eyes, and wore a black robe. Her skin was a little pale, however.

If Dettomolian seemed like a Skeleton, then she seemed like…

A Vampire who really needed a blood bag.

Even Eleris didn't have that bad a complexion.

She seemed slightly sickly with her somewhat pale skin. If one was looking for an example of a pretty girl that exuded a very dark aura, that would be her.

Anyway, all of them were staring at me.

"I didn't make you come here to cuss you out or something. This is your dormitory. Just sit down, guys."

I was trying to talk nicely, but I ended up uttering commands again.

What the fuck?

Did I get too used to that? Was Reinhardt's personality, the embodiment of the saying, "Strong against the weak and weak against the strong", ingrained in my body?

All of them, including Louis Ancton, sat down.

Those guys all had pretty different personalities.

Class B was the main focus of the story and all descriptions, so I knew all the characteristics of each individual character. Of course, I'd gotten to know the guys from Class A better as well.

Louis Ancton was a man who had a great sense of superiority and an idiot who looked down on anyone who was dumber than him to the point that he would even ignore them.

Christina was bright, cheerful, and curious.

Anna de Gerna gave off a rather ghastly and gloomy vibe, but she was actually not that bad.

However, in front of the supervillain that seemed to be me, all three of them froze up like mice before a cat, even though they all had different personalities.

Oh well, it was a good thing, I guess.

It was a lot easier to talk to them when they were calm like that.

“Do you guys have any thoughts of creating something like a magic research group?”

“…Magic research group?”

“…?”

“?”

All of them seemed rather perplexed because they never expected that these words would ever come out of my mouth.

I was pretty sure that they were seeing me as some kind of super villain, but I wasn’t actually planning anything villainous or anything, all I did was plan things to make those guys successful later on.

How would they regret listening to my words?

Those guys would thank me later.

Although… I didn’t know when that would be.

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